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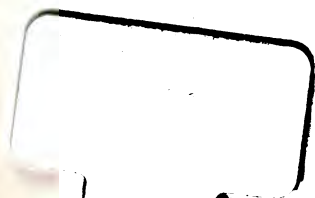
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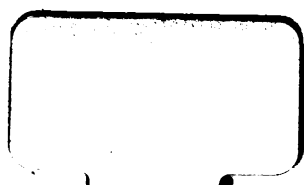
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BLACK SHEEP.

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yates

BLACK SHEEP.

A Novel.

BY

EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF "THE ROCK AHEAD," "THE FORLOREN HOPE," ETC.

42

"Love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave."

New Edition.

C.L.C.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1868.

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BLACK SHEEP.

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BLACK SHEEP.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE AVENUE.

"I'm to keep to the right?"

"Keep on a bearin' to the right, sir, 'cross Watch Common, and down One Ash Hill, and that'll bring you straight on to Poynings, sir! No luggage, sir?"

"None, thank you!"

"Luggage! no! I should think not! party's without a overcoat, don't you see, Thomas?—without a overcoat, and it freezin' like mad! Poynings, indeed! What's he doin' there? He don't look much like one of the company! More like after the spoons, I should say!"

The polite porter who had made the inquiry, and the satirical station-master who had commented on the reply, remained gazing for a minute or two at the stranger who had just arrived at the Amherst station of the South-Eastern Railway, and then went back to the occupations from which the premonitory whistle had called them; which, in the porter's case, consisted of a retirement to a little wooden watch-box where, surrounded by oil-cans, grease-boxes, dirty swabs of cloth, and luggage-barrows reared on end and threatening with their fore-feet, he proceeded to the mending of his shoes with a bit of tin and a few tacks, while the station-master turned to the accounts which extracted the marrow from his very soul, and carried on what he called the "tottle" of a drove of two hundred and sixty oxen, conveyed at per head.

"Freezing like mad." The station-master was right. The frost, which of late years holds aloof, utterly destroying the pictorial prophecies of the artists of the illustrated periodicals regarding Christmas Day, and which, with the exception of a two days' light rime, had left January a moist and muggy month, had set in with the commencement of February, hard, black, and evidently lasting. The iron-bound roads rang again, even under the thin boots of the stranger, who hurried over them with a light and fleeting step. The sharp keen air whirling over bleak Watch Common so penetrated his light, Londonish clothing, that he shivered horribly, and, stopping for an instant, beat his sides with his hands in an awkward manner, as one to whom the process was new, and who was vainly endeavouring to imitate some action he had seen. Then he hurried on with a short rapid jerking step, essentially different from the league-swallowing swinging pace of the regular pedestrian accustomed to exercise; stumbling over the frozen solid ruts made by the heavy cart-wheels, slipping on the icy puddles, and ever and anon pausing to take fresh breath, or to place his hand against his loudly-beating heart. As he skirted the further edge of the common, and arrived at the brow of the hill which the porter had mentioned to him, and which he recognized by the solitary tree whose branches rustled above him in the night wind, he heard, by the chimes of a distant church, ten o'clock rung out sharp and clear through the frosty air. He stopped, counted each chime, and then set off again at a quickened pace, his progress down the descent being easier now, muttering to himself as he went:

"Ten o'clock! I must press on, or they'll all be in bed, I suppose. Beastly respectable, old Carruthers, from what I can make out from my mother, and what little I saw of him! Servants up to prayers and all that kind of thing. No chance of getting hold of her, if I can't make her know I am there, before those prayers come off. Glass of cold water and flat candlestick directly they're over, I suppose, and a kiss to Missy and God bless you all round, and off to bed! By George, what a life! What an infernal, moping, ghostly, dreary existence! And yet they've got money, these scoundrels, and old Carruthers could give you a cheque that

would make you wink. Could! Yes, but wouldn't, especially to me! Ba, ba, black sheep, and all the rest of it! Here's a poor tainted mutton for you, without the wind being in the least tempered to him! Jove, it goes through me like a knife! There'll be a public somewhere near, I suppose, and when I have seen my mother, I'll step off there and have some hot rum-and-water before turning in. Hold up, there, you hawbuck brute, pull your other rein! What's the use of your lamps, if they don't show you people in the road?"

He had sprung aside as he spoke, and now stood flat against and pushing into the leafless hedge as a carriage with flashing lamps and steaming horses whirled so closely by him as almost to brush his arm. The coachman paid no attention to his outcry, nor did the footman, who, almost hidden in overcoats, was fast asleep in the rumble behind. The next instant the carriage was whirling away; but the pedestrian, seeing the condition of the footman, had swung himself on to the hind step, and, crouching down behind the rumble and its unconscious occupant, obtained a shelter from the bitter wind, and simultaneously a lift on his road. There he crouched, clinging firmly with both hands in close proximity to the enshrouded knees of the unconscious footman—knees which, during their owner's sleep, were very helpless and rather comic, which smote each other in the passage of every rut, and occasionally parted and displayed a dreary gulf of horsecloth between them, to be brought together at the next jolt with a very smart concussion—and there he remained until the stopping of the carriage, and a sharp cry of "Gate" from the coachman, induced him to descend from his perch, and to survey the state of affairs from that side of the carriage most removed from a certain light and bustle into which they had entered. For, on the other side of the carriage to that on which the stranger stood, was an old-fashioned stone lodge with twinkling lights in its little mullioned windows, and all its thousand ivy-leaves gleaming in the carriage-lamps, and happy faces grouped around its door. There was the buxom lodge-keeper the centre of the group, with her comely red face all aglow with smiles; and there was her light-haired, sheep-faced husband standing by the swinging iron gates; and there were the sturdy children,

indulged with the unwonted dissipation of "sitting up;" and there was the gardener's wife awaiting to see company come in, while her master had gone up to look at fires in hothouses; and there were Kidd, the head keeper, and little Tom, his poor idiot boy, who clapped his hands at the whirling lights of the carriages, and kept up an incessant boom of imbecile happiness. Sheep-faced male lodge-keeper bobbing so furiously as to insist on recognition, down goes window of carriage furthest from the stranger, and crisp on the night air cries a sharp curt voice,

"How do, Bulger? Not late, eh, ? hum—ah! not late?"

To which Bulger, pulling at invisible lock of hair on forehead:

"No, Sir Thomas! Lots company, Sir Thomas! Seasonable weather, Sir—"

But the carriage was whirled away before Bulger could conclude, and before the stranger could resume his place under the sheltering lee of the now conscious footman. He shrank back into the darkness—darkness deeper and thicker than ever under the shadow of the tall elms forming the avenue leading to the house, and remained for a minute buried in thought.

The night was clear, and even light, with the hard chilly light of stars, and the air was full of cold—sharp, pitiless, and piercing. The wind made itself heard but rarely, but spared the wayfarer not one pang of its presence. He shrank and shivered, as he peered from under the gaunt branches of the trees after the carriage with its glittering lights.

"Just like my luck!" he thought bitterly. "Nothing is to be wanting to make me feel myself the outcast that I am. A stranger in my mother's house, disowned and proscribed by my mother's husband, slinking like a thief behind the carriages of my mother's fine friends. I will see my mother, I must see her; it is a desperate chance, but surely it must succeed. I have no doubt of *her*, God bless her! but I have my doubts of her power to do what I want."

He emerged from the shadow of the trees again, and struck into the avenue. He quickened his pace, shivering, and seeing the long line of way lying level before him in the sombre glimmer of the night, he went on with a more assured step. Angry and bitter

thoughts were keeping the young man company, a gloomy wrath was in his dark, deep-set eyes, and the hands which he thrust into his coat-pockets clenched themselves with an almost fierce impatience. He strode on, muttering, and trying to keep up an air of hardihood (though there was no one to be deceived but himself), which was belied by the misgivings and remorse at his heart.

"A fine place and a grand house, plenty of money, and all that money gives, and no place for her only son! I wonder how she likes it all! No, no, I don't; I know she is not happy, and it's my fault, and *his*." His face grew darker and more angry, and he shook his clenched hand towards a stately house, whose long lighted façade now became visible.

"And *his*—*his* who married my mother and deceived her, who gave her hopes he never intended to fulfil—my ill conduct the cause of his forbidding her to bring me here!—he always hated me; he hated me before he saw me, before he ever knew that I was not a sucking dove for gentleness and a pattern of filial obedience and propriety; he hated me because I existed—because I was my mother's son; and if I had been the most amenable of step-sons, he would have hated me all the same, only he would have shown his hatred differently, that's all. I should have been brought here, and made to feel insignificance, instead of being left to beg or starve, for all he cares. I am better off as it is."

A harsh smile came over his face for a moment. "Quite a blackguard, and all but a beggar. All but? No, quite a beggar, for I am coming to beg of my mother—coming to your fine house, Capel Carruthers, like a thief or a spy; slinking in at your gates, under cover of your fine friends' fine carriages; a prodigal step-son, by Jove, without the faintest chance of a welcome, and every probability of being turned out, if discovered. Company here, too, of all nights in the year, to make it more difficult to get hold of old Brookes unsuspected, but not so unfortunate either, if I'm seen. Hangers about are to be found even in the country, I suppose, on festive occasions. There's the house at last! A grand place, grim as it is under the stars, with a twinkling firmament of its own on the ground floor. The lights look warm. Good God, how cold it is out here!" Again he drew back close to the tall dark stems of

the trees, to let a carriage pass ; when it had discharged its load under the portico, he emerged cautiously upon the broad carriage sweep by which the company were arriving.

The house was an old one, and was surrounded by a narrow fosse or ditch, which in former days might have been full of water, and used for defensive purposes, but which was now drained and dry, and served as a kind of area, looked into by the windows in the basement. Above this fosse, and stretching away on either side of the heavy portico, was a broad and handsome stone terrace, the left hand portion of which lay in deep shadow, while the right hand portion was chequered with occasional light, which made its way through the partially closed shutters of the ball-room. Cautiously crossing the broad drive, and slipping behind a carriage which was just discharging its load at the hall door, George Dallas, the stranger whose fortunes we have so far followed, crept into a dark angle of the porch until the crunching of the gravel and the clanging of the door announced the departure of the carriage, and then, climbing the balustrade of the terrace, and carefully avoiding the lines of light, made his way to the window of the room, and peered in. At first, he shook so with the cold, that he could not concentrate his attention on what was passing before his eyes ; but having groped about and found a small tree which was carefully protected with a large piece of matting, and which flanked one end of the balustrade, he quietly removed the matting, and, wrapping it round him, returned to his position, watching and commenting on the scene of which he was a spectator.

It was an old room on which George Dallas looked—an old room with panelled walls, surmounted by a curious carved frieze and stuccoed roof, and hung round with family portraits, which gave it a certain grim and stern air, and made the gay hothouse flowers, with which it was lavishly decorated, seem out of keeping. Immediately opposite the window stood the entrance door, wide open, and flanked by the usual bevy of young men, who, from laziness or bashfulness, take some time to screw their courage up to dancing-point. Close in front of them was a group which at once arrested George Dallas's attention.

It consisted of three persons, of whom two were gentlemen ;

the third was a young girl, whose small white-gloved hand rested on the arm of the older of her companions, who, as George Dallas caught sight of them, was in the act of presenting the younger to her. The girl was tall, slight, very graceful and elegant, and extremely fair. Her features were not clearly discernible, as she stood sideways towards the window; but the pose of the head, the bend of the neck, the braids of fair hair closely wound round the well-shaped head, and worn without any ornament but its own golden gloss, the sweeping folds of her soft white dress—all bore a promise of beauty, which indeed her face, had he seen it, would have fully realized. He saw her bow, in graceful acknowledgment of the introduction, and then linger for a few minutes talking with the two gentlemen—to the younger of whom George Dallas paid no attention whatever; after which she moved away with him to join the dancers. The older man stood where she had left him, and at him George Dallas looked with the fixed intensity of anger and hatred.

“There you are,” he muttered, “you worthy, respectable, hard-hearted, unblemished gentleman! There you are, with your clear complexion and your iron-grey whiskers, with your cold blue eyes and your white teeth, with your thin lips and your long chin, with your head just a little bald, and your ears just a little shrivelled, but not much; with your upright figure, and your nice cool hands, and your nice cool heart, too, that never knew an ungratified lust, or a passion which wasn't purely selfish. There you are, the model of respectability and wealth, and the essence of tyranny and pride! There you are—and you married my beautiful mother when she was poor, and when her son needed all that she could give him, and more; and you gave her wealth, and a fine house, and fine friends, and your not remarkably illustrious name, and everything she could possibly desire, except the only thing she wanted, and the only thing, as I believe, for which she married you. That's your niece, of course, the precious heiress, the rich and rare young lady who has a place in your house, though the son of its mistress is banished from it. That's the heiress, who probably does not know that I exist. I should not be surprised if he had ordered my mother to conceal the disgraceful fact.

Well, the girl is a nice creature, I dare say ; she looks like it. But where can my mother be ? ”

He approached the window still more closely ; he ventured to place his face close to the panes for a moment, as he peered anxiously into the room. “ Where is my mother ? ” he thought. “ Good Heaven ! if she did but know that I am shivering here. ”

The strains of sweet clear music reached his ears, floods of light streamed out from the ball-room, a throng of dancers whirled past the window, he saw the soft fluttering dresses, he heard the rustle of the robes, the sounds of the gay voices, and the ring of laughter, and ever and anon, as a stray couple fell away from the dance, and lingered near the window, a fair young face would meet his gaze, and the happy light of its youth and pleasure would shine upon him. He lingered, fascinated, in spite of the cold, the misery of his situation, and the imminent risk of detection to which he was exposed. He lingered, and looked, with the longing of youth for gaiety and pleasure ; in his case for a simple gaiety, a more sinless pleasure, than any he was wont to know. Suddenly he shrank quickly back and clutched hard at the covering of matting in which he had shrouded himself. A figure had crossed the window, between him and the light—a figure he knew well, and recognized with a beating heart—a figure clad in purple velvet and decked with gleaming jewels ; it was his mother. She passed hastily, and went up to Mr Carruthers, then talking with another gentleman. She stretched out one jewelled arm, and touched him on the shoulder with her fan. Mr Carruthers turned, and directly faced the window. Then George Dallas flung the matting which had covered him away, and left his hiding-place with a curse in his heart and on his lips.

“ Yes, curse you, ” he said, “ you dress her in velvet and diamonds, and make her splendid to entertain your company and flatter your pride, and you condemn her to such misery as only soft-hearted, strong-natured women such as she is can feel, all the time. But it won’t do, Carruthers ; she’s my mother, though she’s your wife, and you can’t change her. I’ll have some of your money, tyrant as you are, and slave as she is, before this night is

over. I'm a desperate man ; you can't make me more miserable than I am, and I *can* bring you to shame, and I *will*, too."

He stepped softly to the edge of the terrace, climbed the balustrade, and sat down cautiously on the narrow strip of grass beyond ; then felt with his hands along the rough face of the wall which formed the front of the area. He looked down between his feet, the depth was about ten feet. He thought he might venture to let himself drop. He did so, and came safely on his feet, on the smooth sanded ground. An angle of the house was close to him ; he turned it, and came upon a window whose shutters, like those of the upper range, were unclosed, and through which he could see into the comfortable room beyond. The room was low but large, and the heavy carved presses, the table with green baize cover, the arm-chairs, one at each side of the fire, the serviceable, comfortable, and responsible appearance of the apartment, at once indicated its true character. It could be nothing but the house-keeper's room.

In the centre of the table stood an old-fashioned oil-lamp, no doubt banished from the upper regions when the moderator made its appearance in society ; close to the stand was a large Bible open, a pair of spectacles lying upon the page. A brass-bound desk, a file of receipts, a Tunbridge-ware work-box, and a venerable inkstand, were also symmetrically arranged upon the table. The room was empty, and the observer at the window had ample leisure and opportunity to scrutinize it.

"I am in luck," he said. "This is Nurse Ellen's room. There are the dreadful old portraits which she always insisted on keeping over the chimney-piece, and venerated, quite as much because she thought them objects of art, as because she fancied them really like my father and mother. There's her Bible, with the date of my birth and christening in it. I dare say those are the identical spectacles which I broke, playing Red Riding Hood's grandmother. I wish she would come in, and come alone. What shall I do if she brings any one with her, and they close the shutters? How delightful the fire looks ! I have a great mind to smash the window and get in. No one would hear the noise with all that

crashing music overhead, and there does not seem to be a soul on this side of the house."

No sound of footsteps made itself audible on the terrace above his head. He was sheltered a little more in his present position, but still the cold was bitter, and he was shivering. The impulse to break the window grew stronger. He thought how he should avoid cutting his hand; his shabby gloves could not protect him, suppose he were to take off his waistcoat, and twist it around his hand and arm. He had unfastened one button of his coat, as the idea occurred to him, when a sound overhead, on the house side, caught his ear. It was the click produced by opening the fastening of a French window. Then came steps upon the light balcony, which was one of the modern decorations of the old building, and voices which reached him distinctly.

"Any influenza you may catch, or anything of that kind, you must ascribe to yourself, Miss Carruthers. You would come out this—hum—by Jove—awful night!"

"Oh, don't fear for me, Captain Marsh," said a light girlish voice, laughingly, "I'm country bred, you know, and accustomed to be out in all weathers, so that I run no risk; and though it is wintry enough outside, the temperature of that room was becoming unbearable!"

"Think it must be caused by that old woman's red face that we noticed, or the thingummy—paradise feather in her cap. She with the very thin daughter. Don't you know?"

"Of course I know. The old lady is my aunt, Lady Boldero; the young one is my cousin Blanche!"

"Haw, by Jove, sorry I spoke, haw! By-the-by, that was Sir Thomas Boldero's park, where I met you riding on Friday, wasn't it, Miss Carruthers?"

"Yes. I was taking a short cut home, as I thought I should be late for dinner."

"You were going a rattling good pace, I noticed. Seemed quite to have distanced your groom."

"My groom! That's a luxury I very seldom indulge in—never, when I think I can dispense with it without my uncle's knowledge. It is disagreeable to me to have a man perpetually at my heels!"

"You shouldn't say that, Miss Carruthers—shouldn't, indeed. You don't know how pleasant it is—for the man."

"Very pretty indeed, Captain Marsh! And now that you've had the chance of paying a compliment, and have done it so neatly, we will go back, please. I begin to feel a little chilly."

As the speakers moved, something fell at George Dallas's feet. It was so dark in the corner where he stood, that he could not distinguish what it was, until the closing of the window above gave him assurance that he might move in safety. Then he bent forward, and found it was a sprig of myrtle. He picked it up, looked at it idly, and put it into the breast-pocket of his coat.

"What a sweet voice she has!" he thought. "A sweet face too, I am sure; it must be so, to match the voice and the hair. Well, she has given me something, though she didn't intend it, and will probably never know it. A spirited, plucky girl, I am sure, for all her grace and her blonde style. Carries too many guns for the captain, that's clear!"

He dived down in the midst of his thoughts, for the door of the room into which he had been looking, opened quietly, and an elderly woman in a black silk dress entered. After casting a glance round her, she was about to seat herself at the table, when Dallas gave two low taps in quick succession at the window. The woman started and looked towards the spot whence the sound came with a half-keen, half-frightened glance, which melted into unmixed astonishment when Dallas placed his face close to the glass and beckoned to her with his hand. Then she approached the window, shading her eyes from the candlelight and peering straight before her. When she was close to the window, she said, in a low firm voice:

"Who are you? Speak at once, or I'll call for help!"

"It's I, Nurse Ellen. I—"

"Good Heavens, Master George!"

"Yes, yes; open the window and let me in. I want to talk to you, and I'm half dead with cold. Let me in. So. That's it."

The woman gently raised the sash, and so soon as the aperture admitted of the passage of his body, he slipped through and entered the room, taking no notice of his old nurse, but making

straight for the fire, before which he knelt, gazing hungrily at the flames, and spreading both his hands in eager welcome of the blaze. The old woman closed the window and then came softly behind him, placed her hand on his head, and, leaning over his shoulder and looking into his face, muttered: "Good Lord, how changed you are, my boy! I should scarcely have known you, except for your eyes, and they're just the same; but in everything else, how changed!"

He was changed indeed. The last time George Dallas had taken farewell of his old nurse, he had parted from her, a big strong healthy youth of eighteen, with short curly brown hair, clear skin, bright complexion, the incarnation of youth and strength and health. He knelt before her now, a gaunt grisly man, with high cheek-bones and hollow rings round his great brown eyes, with that dead sodden pallor which a life of London dissipation always produces, and with long thin bony hands with which he clutched hold of the old woman, who put her arms round him and seemed about to burst into a fit of sobbing.

"Don't do that, nurse! don't do that! I'm weak myself, and seedy, and couldn't stand it. Get me something to drink, will you? And, look here! I must see my mother to-night, at once. I've come from town on purpose, and I must see her."

"She does not know you are here?" asked Mrs Brookes, while she gazed mournfully at the young man, still kneeling before the fire. "But of course she does not, or she would have told me."

"Of course, of course, Nurse Ellen," said George Dallas; "she knows nothing about it. If I had asked her leave, she would not have dared to give it. How is she, nurse? How does she like her life? She tells me very little of herself when she writes to me, and that's not often." He rose from his knees now, and pulled a ponderous black horsehair chair close to the fire, seated himself in it, and sat huddled together, as though cold even yet, with his feet on the broad old-fashioned fender. "I had to come at any risk. You shall know all about it, nurse; but now you must contrive to tell my mother I am here."

"How can I do that, Master George?" asked the old woman, in a tone of distress and perplexity. "She is in the ball-room, and

all the grand folk are looking at her and talking to her. I can't go in among them, and if I could, she would be so frightened and put about, that master would see in a moment that something had happened. He is never far off were she is."

"Ha!" said George gloomily; "watches her, does he, and that kind of thing?"

"Well, not exactly," said Mrs Brookes; "not in a nasty sort of way. I must say, to do him justice, though I don't much like him, that Mr Carruthers is a good husband; he's fond of her, and proud of her, and he likes to see her admired."

The young man interrupted her with selfish heedlessness.

"Well, it's a pity he has the chance to-night; but, however it's managed, I must see her. I have to go back to town to-morrow, and of course I can't come about here safely in the daytime. Think of some plan, nurse, and look sharp about it."

"I might go upstairs and join the servants—they are all about the ball-room door—and watch for an opportunity as she passes."

"That will take time," said George, "but it's the best chance. Then do it, nurse, and give me something to eat while you are away. Will any of the servants come in here? They had better not see me, you know."

"No, you are quite safe; they are looking at the dancing," she answered, absently, and closing as she spoke the shutters of the window by which he had entered. She then left the room, but quickly returned, bringing in a tray with cold meat, bread, and wine. He still sat by the fire, now with his head thrown back against the high straight back of his chair, and his hands thrust into his pockets.

"Very plain fare, Master George," said the housekeeper, "but I can't find anything better without wasting time."

"Never mind, nurse. I'm not hungry, and I'm not above eating cold meat if I were. Beggars must not be choosers, you know; and I'm little better than a beggar, as you also know. Give me some wine. It isn't felony, is it, though I have got into my step-father's house through the window, and am drinking his wine without his knowledge or consent?"

His tone was very painful to the faithful old woman's ear. She

looked at him wistfully, but made no reply. He rose from the chair by the fire, sullenly drew another chair to the table, and sat down by the tray. Mrs Brookes left the room, and took her way along the white stone passage which led to the entrance hall of the mansion. Passing through a swinging door covered with crimson cloth, she entered a spacious square hall, decorated, after the fashion of country houses, with stags' heads and antlers. The floor was of polished oak, and uncarpeted, but at each of the six doors which opened into it lay a soft white rug. A bright fire blazed in the ample grate; and through the open door of the ball-room, light and the sound of music poured into the hall. A number of servants were standing about, some lingering by the fire, a few ranged close to the door of the dancing-room, exchanging comments upon the performances with perfect impunity. Under cover of the music Mrs Brookes joined the group, which respectfully gave way at her approach, and ceded to her the front place. She looked anxiously, and for some time vainly, for her mistress. At length she perceived her, but she was seated at the further end of the room, in conversation with an elderly lady of extraordinary magnificence in point of apparel, and who required to be spoken to through an ear-trumpet. Mrs Carruthers was not a skilful performer upon that instrument, and was obliged to give her whole mind to it, so that there was little chance of her looking in any other direction than the uninviting one of Mrs Chittenden's ear for the present. Mrs Brookes looked on impatiently, and longed for a break in the dancing, and a consequent movement among the company. At length the music ceased, the panting waltzers subsided into promenade, and Mrs Carruthers rose to place her chair at the disposal of a young lady whose exertions had told upon her, and who breathlessly accepted the boon. As she stood for a moment turned towards the door, she caught sight of the housekeeper's face, and saw she looked pale and agitated. Catching her mistress's eye, the housekeeper made a slight stealthy sign. Very gracefully, and with perfect calm, the tall figure, in its sweeping velvet dress, made its way through the dispersed groups between it and the door, from which all the servants had precipitately retreated at the cessation of the music. What was wrong?

Mrs Carruthers thought. Something, she knew, must be wrong, or Ellen would not be there beckoning to her. A second gesture, still more stealthy and warning, caused her to pause when within reach of the housekeeper's whisper, without turning her head towards her.

"What is it, Ellen?"

"Hush! where is master? Can he see you?"

"Yes, he is just beyond the screen. What is the matter?"

"Turn round, and stoop; let me tie your shoe—there!"

Mrs Carruthers stood in the doorway, and bent her head, holding her foot out, and lifting her dress. Mrs Brookes fumbled with the shoe, as she whispered rapidly:

"Come as soon as you can to my room. Be careful that you are not missed. Some one is there who wants to see you."

"To see me, Ellen? On such a night, and at such an hour! What is wrong? Who is there?"

The old woman looked earnestly into the frightened face, bending over her, and said rather with her lips than with her voice: "Master George!"

CHAPTER II.

IN THE HOUSEKEEPER'S ROOM.

GEORGE DALLAS had eaten but sparingly of the food which Mrs Brookes had placed before him. He was weary and excited, and he bore the delay and the solitude of the housekeeper's room with feverish impatience. He strode up and down the room, stooping occasionally before the fire to kick at the crumbling logs, and glance at the clock, which marked how rapidly the night was waning. Half an hour, which seemed three times as much to him, had elapsed since Mrs Brookes had left him. Faintly and indistinctly the sounds of the music reached him, adding to his irritation and weariness. A savage frown darkened his face, and he muttered to

himself in the same tone as that of his spasmodic soliloquy in the avenue :

"I wonder if she's thinking that I ought to be there too ; or if I ought not, neither ought she. After all, I'm her son, and she might make a stand-up fight for me, if she would. He's fond of her, the old woman says, and proud of her, and well he may be. What's the use of it all, if she can't manage him ? What fools women are ! If they only could calculate at first, and take their own line from the beginning, they could manage any men. But she's afraid of him, and she lets him find it out. Well, well, it must be wretched enough for her, too. But why does she not come ?"

He had to wait a little longer yet, for another quarter of an hour had elapsed before Mrs Brookes returned.

"Is she coming ?" he asked eagerly, when at length the pale-faced little woman gently entered the room.

"Yes, she is coming. She has to wait until the first lot are gone in to supper. Then master will not miss her."

The old woman came up to him, and took his right hand in hers, looking fondly, but keenly, into his face, and laying the other hand upon his shoulder. "George," she said, "George, my darling boy, I hope you have not brought her very bad news."

He tried to laugh as he loosed his hand, not unkindly, from the old woman's grasp.

"Do you suppose good news would have brought me here where I am forbidden—smuggled goods ?"

She shook her head sorrowfully.

"At all events, you are alive and well to tell your ill news yourself, and that is everything to her," said Mrs Brookes.

The next moment the door opened, and Mrs Carruthers came in with a hurried step. George Dallas started forward, and caught her in his arms.

"Mother ! mother !" "My boy, my darling boy !" were the only words spoken between them, until they were quite alone.

Mrs Brookes left the room, and the young man was free to explain his untimely visit.

"I dread to ask what brings you here, George," said his mother,

as she seated herself upon the heavy sofa, and drew him to her side. "I cannot but rejoice to see you, but I am afraid to ask you why you come."

A mingling of pleasure and apprehension shook her voice, and heightened her colour.

"You may well dread to ask me, mother," replied the young man gloomily. "You may well dread to ask what brings me, outcast as I am, to your fine home, to the place where your husband is master, and where my presence is forbidden."

"George, George!" said his mother, in a tone of grief and remonstrance.

"Well, I know it's no fault of yours, but it's hard to bear for all that, and I'm not quite such a monster as I am made out to be, to suit Mr Carruthers's purposes. I'm not so very much worse than the young men, mother, whose step-fathers, or whose own fathers either, don't find it necessary to forbid them the house. But you're afraid of him, mother, and—"

"George," said Mrs Carruthers quietly, but sternly, "you did not come here to see me for the first time in nine months, at the risk of being turned out of Mr Carruthers's house, simply to vent your anger upon him, and to accuse me wrongfully, and taunt me with what I am powerless to prevent. Tell me what has brought you here. I can stay with you only a little while; at any moment I may be missed. Tell me what has brought you against my husband's commands, contrary to my own entreaties, though it is such a delight to me to see you even so." And the mother put her arms around the neck of her prodigal son, and kissed him fondly. Her tears were falling on his rough brown curls.

"Don't cry over me, mother; I'm not worth it; I never was; and you mustn't go back to your company with pale cheeks and red eyes. There, there, it's not so bad as it might be, you know; for as nurse says, I'm alive and well to tell it. The fact is—" He rose, and walked up and down the room in front of the sofa on which his mother was sitting, while he spoke. "The fact is, I must have money. Don't start, don't be frightened. I have not done anything very dreadful, only the consequences are nearly as fatal as if I had. I have not stolen, or forged, or embezzled

property. I am not rich or respectable enough to get the chance. But I have lost a large sum at the gaming-table—a sum I don't possess, and have no other means than this of getting."

"Go on," said his mother. She was deadly pale now, and her hands were tightly clasped together, as they lay on her lap, white and slender, against the rich purple of her velvet dress.

He glanced at her, quickened his step, and continued in a hard reckless tone, but with some difficulty of utterance. "I should have been utterly ruined but for a friend of mine, who lent me the money. Play debts must be paid, mother; and Routh, though he's not much richer than I am, would not let me be completely lost for want of a helping hand. But he had to borrow the money. He could get it lent to him. There's no one but him to lend *me* a shilling, and he did get it, and I had it and paid it away. But in a short time now he must pay it back and the interest upon it. Luck has been against us both."

"Against you *both*, George," said Mrs Carruthers. "Is your friend also a gambler, then?"

"Yes, he is," said Dallas, roughly; "he is a gambler. All my friends are gamblers and drunkards, and everything that's bad. What would you have? Where am I to get pious, virtuous, respectable friends? I haven't a shilling; I haven't a character. Your husband has taken care I shall have no credit. Every one knows I am disowned by Mr Carruthers, and forbidden to show my face at Poynings; and I'm not showing it; I'm only in the servants' quarters, you see." Again he laughed, and again his mother shrank from the sound. "But though my friend is a gambler, like myself, he helps me when I want help, and inconveniences himself to do it. Perhaps that's more than respectable friends—if I had them—would do for me. It's more than I have ever known respectable friends to do for any one."

Mrs Carruthers rose, and turned her colourless face upon her son. There was an angry light in her large hazel eyes, whose dewy brightness time had not yet greatly harmed. As they confronted each other, a strong likeness between the mother and son asserted itself. "George," she said, "you are putting me to needless pain.

You have said enough to show me that you are unchanged. You have come here, endangering my peace, and compromising yourself, for the purpose, I suppose, of asking me for money to repay this person who relieved you from a gambling debt. Is this your business here?"

"Yes," he said shortly, and with a lowering brow.

"Then listen to me. I cannot give you any money." He started, and came close up to her. "No, George. I have no money at my disposal, and you ought to know that, as well as I know it. Every shilling I have ever had of my own I have given you. You know I never grudged it. You know you had it all; but that leaves me without resources. Mr Carruthers will not help you. She grew paler still, and her lips trembled. "I have asked him many times to alter his determination, a determination which you cannot say is undeserved, George, but it is in vain. I might, perhaps, wonder that you would stoop to take assistance from a man who has such an opinion of you, and who has forbidden you his house, but that the sad knowledge I have gained of such lives as yours has taught me that they utterly destroy self-respect—that a profligate is the meanest of creatures. Calm yourself. There is no use in giving loose to your temper towards me, George. You have the power to afflict me still, but you can deceive me no more."

She sat down again, wearily, leaning her arm on the back of the sofa, and her head on her hand. There was silence for a few moments. Then she said:

"How much money do you owe this man, George, and when must it be paid?"

"I owe him a hundred and forty pounds, mother, and it must be paid this day month."

"A hundred and forty pounds?" repeated Mrs Carruthers, in a terrified tone.

"Yes; precisely that sum, and I have not a pound in the world to exist on in the mean time. I am cleaned out, that's the fact," he went on, with a dismal attempt at speaking lightly; "and I can't carry on any longer." But he spoke to inattentive ears. His mother was lost in thought.

"I cannot give you money," she said at length. "I have not the command of any."

"This doesn't look like want of it," said her son bitterly, as he caught a handful of her velvet dress in his grasp, and then dropped it scornfully.

"My personal expenses are all dictated by Mr Carruthers, George, and all known to him. Don't suppose I am free to purchase dress or not, as I choose. I tell you the exact truth, as I have always told you." She spoke coldly and seriously, like one whose mind is made up to a great trial, who hopes neither to alter its character nor to lessen its weight.

"I only know I must have it," he said; "or I don't see any resource for me except to cut my throat."

"No, no," returned his mother, "do not say such dreadful things. Give me time. I will try to find some way of helping you by the time you must have the money. O my boy, my boy!" she covered her face with her hands and sobbed.

George Dallas looked at her irresolutely, then came quickly towards her, and leaned over her, as she sat. "Mother," he said, in low hurried tones, "mother, trust me once more, little as I deserve it. Try to help me in this matter; it is life or death to me; and I will try and do better. I am sick of it all; sick of my own weakness above and more than all. But I am irretrievably ruined if I don't get this money. I am quite in Routh's power—and—and—I want to get out of it."

She looked up curiously at him. Something in the way he said those words at once alarmed and reassured her.

"In this man's power, George? How? To what extent?"

"I cannot tell you, mother; you would not understand. Don't frighten yourself about it. It is nothing that money cannot settle. I have had a lesson now. You shake your head—well, I know I have had many before, but I *will* learn from this one."

"I have not the money, George," his mother repeated, "and I cannot possibly procure it for a little time. You must not stay here."

"I know, I know," he retorted. "You need not re-echo Mr Carruthers's interdict. I am going; but surely you can give me a

little now ; the price of one of these things would go a long way with me." As he spoke, he touched, with no rough hand, her earrings and the bracelets on her right arm.

"They are family jewels, or you should have them, George," Mrs Carruthers said in a sad voice. "Give me time, and I will make up the money for you. I have a little I can give you. She stood up and looked fixedly at him, her hands resting on his shoulder. The tall and powerful young man, with his haggard anxious face, his hardened look, his shabby careless dress, offered a strange contrast to the woman, whose beauty time had dealt with so lightly, and fortune so generously. Mrs Carruthers had been a mere girl when her son was born, and probably had not been nearly so beautiful as now, when the calm dignity of position and the power of wealth lent all their attractions to her perfect face and form.

The habitual seriousness of her expression was but a charm the more, and in moments of excited feeling like the present she regained the lustrous brilliancy of the past. Searchingly, fondly, she gazed into her son's face, as though reading it for traces of the truth of his promises, seeing in it but too surely indications of the weary, unsatisfying life he had led, the life which had brought disappointment to all her dearest maternal hopes. Steadily and tenderly he looked at her, a world of regret in his eyes. While they stood thus in brief silence, Mrs Brookes came in hurriedly.

"You are wanted," he said. "Master is asking for you ; he has sent Miss Clare to your room to see if you are ill."

"I must go, my boy," said Mrs Carruthers, as she hastily kissed him ; "and you must not stay. Come with me, Ellen, for a moment. Wait here, George, for what I promised you, and don't travel back to town without an overcoat." Then she left the room at once, the housekeeper with her. George stood where she had left him, looking towards the door.

"My dear practical mother," he said to himself, "she is as kind and as sensible as ever. Wretched about me, but remembering to desire me to buy a coat ! I know she will get me the money somehow, and this *shall* be the last scrape I will get into. It's no use being melodramatic, especially when one is all alone, but I here

make a solemn promise to myself that I will keep my promise to *her*."

He sat down by the fire, and remained still and thoughtful. In a few minutes Mrs Brookes returned. "Here's the money, Master George," she said. "I was to give it to you with my mistress's love, and she will write to you to London."

He took the folded paper from her hand. It was a ten-pound note.

"Thank you, nurse," he said; "and now I will go." I would like to stay and have a talk with you; but I had better get away, lest any annoyance should come to my mother through my staying. I'll see you when you come up to town to the fine house in Mesopotamia. Eh?"

"Lord, Master George, how you do go on! Why, Mr Carruthers's new house is the far side of the Park."

"I know, nurse. It's all the same thing. No. No more wine, thank you, and nothing to eat. Good-bye.—How am I to get out, though? Not through the window, and up the area wall, am I?"

"I'll show you, Master George. This way."

George Dallas buttoned his coat tightly across his breast, carefully put on his gloves, and took up his hat. As he followed Mrs Brookes through the long stone passages of the basement story, he looked curiously about him, noting the details of comfort and convenience. "How much better off than I are my mother's servants!" he thought, idly rather than bitterly. When they reached a door which opened upon the court-yard, Mrs Brookes bade him farewell, not without emotion.

"The great gates are open," she said. "All the servants are either in the hall or the servants' hall. None of the carriages have been called yet. You can slip past without being seen; or if any one sees you, they'll think you belong to the place."

"A serious mistake, dear old woman," said George, with a half-smile, as he once more shook her hand, and stepped out into the cold and darkness. A bitter sense of desolation came over him as the door closed behind him. The court-yard was empty, except of carriages, and he crossed it quickly, and went through the great gates into the avenue, which swept round the terrace. Following

it, he found himself brought again by a different route in front of the lighted ball-room ; but he did not delay to glance at the scene.

"So I am going away," he said to himself, "richer by ten pounds and my mother's promise. Stop, though ! There's the sprig of myrtle. I must not forget or lose the unconscious gift of the great heiress. I wish I had asked nurse what sort of girl she is. I might have taken time to do that. It's not so cold as it was." He had been warmed and fed, and his spirits had risen. It did not take much to raise George Dallas's spirits, even now when the excesses of his wasted life were beginning to tell upon him. "I feel quite strong again. The night is lighter ; the village must be a wretched place. I have a great mind to push on to Amherst. It's only seven miles, and Carruthers can't hear that I have been there ; but he might hear of me at the village, and bother my mother about it."

He took his way down the avenue and reached the gate, which lay open. One feeble light twinkled from the upper window of the gate lodge. Bulger and family had retired to rest, the excitement of the arrivals being over, and Bulger would leave the gate to take care of itself until morning. Unquestioned, unseen, George Dallas left Poynings, and, turning to the right under the park wall, set forth at a steady pace towards Amherst.

The town of Amherst is very much like the other towns in that part of the country. Close by the railway station lies the Railway Tavern, snug and comfortable, with a "quick draught" of home-brewed ale and bitter beer, thanks to the powers of suction of porters, guards, and admiring friends of both, who vent their admiration in "standing glasses round." Not a little of its custom does the Railway Tavern owe to that small plot of waste ground in front of it, where, even on this desolate night, you might trace the magic circle left by the "ring" of Signor Quagliasco's Mammoth Circus on its visit last autumn, and the holes for the pole and tent-pegs, and the most recent ruts on which were left by the wheels of the cart of the travelling photographer who "took" the entire town at Christmas, and, in addition to the photograph, presented each sitter with a blue card embossed with a scarlet robin bearing in its mouth the legend, "A happy new year to you."

Then villas ; Mr Cobb's, the corn-chandler and coal-merchant, with a speckled imitation-granite porch, white and black, as if it had been daubed with a mixture of its owner's flour and coal-dust ; Mr Lawson's, the attorney, with a big brass plate on its outer gate, and two stone pine-apples flanking the entrance ; Mr Charlton Biggs's, the hop-merchant, in all the gentility of a little chaise-house leaning against the street door, approached by a little carriage-drive so narrow that the pony had never yet walked up it properly, but had always been ignominiously "backed" into its tiny home. Then the outskirts of the town ; the Independent Chapel, very square, very red-faced, and very compact, not to say sat upon ; the Literary Institute, with more green damp on its stuccoed walls than had been originally intended by its architect, and with fragmentary bills of "Mr Lens's Starry Carpet, or the Heavens at a Glance," fluttering in the night wind from its portico. Merton house comes next, formerly the stronghold of the Merton-Mertons, the great Kentish family, now Mr Bompas's Classical and Commercial Academy, with a full view of the white dimity bedsteads through the open window, and with "Old Bompas's Blaggards" inscribed—by the boys of the National School, with whom the grand Bompasians waged constant warfare—on the doorpost. The commencement of the town, a mouldy old bay-windowed shop, known to Mr Bompas's boys as "Mother Jennings's," and as the repository of "tuck," said tuck consisting of stale buns, hardbake, "all sorts," toffee, treacle, new rolls, sugar mutton-chops elegantly painted and gilt, sugar rum and gin bottles, whipcord, pegtops, and marbles ; then Bullenger's, apparently a small ironmonger's, but in reality another lure for the money of Bompas's boys, for in a parlour behind his back shop Bullenger vended fireworks and half-crown detonating pistols, catapults, and cross-bows, and all sorts of such-like instruments dear to predatory boys. Then the ordinary lot of butchers, bakers, tailors, hosiers, grocers, chemists (Mr Hotten, member of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, also strongly reliant on Bompas's custom for cigars and hair-oil for the big boys, and bath-pipe and liquorice for the little ones), and then the police-station ; the old gray church, with its square ivy-covered

tower, its billowy graves and its half-obliterated sun-dial over the porch, and then the fresh green fields again.

All these particulars George Dallas noted in the morning, when, having early left the bed he had procured at the inn, he called in at the station and learned from the friendly porter, who was again engaged in mending his shoes with tin and tacks, when the next train would start for London, and where he could find a tailor's shop, walked briskly through the little town, with feelings very different from those which had possessed him on his first arrival at the Amherst station. Now, his step was free and light, he carried his head erect, and though he occasionally shivered as the cold wind came sweeping over the downs and gave him a sharp unfriendly nip as it hurried by him in its progress to the sea, he bore the insult with tolerable fortitude, and seemed to derive immediate comfort from plunging his hand into his trousers pocket, where lay the ten-pound note he had received from his mother. It was there, stiff and crisp to his touch. He had taken it out and looked at it twice or thrice on the road, but he could not do that now in the town; he must content himself with touching it, and the crinkling sound was music in his ear; he had been so long without money, that he derived the keenest pleasure from the possession of this actual tangible sum, and felt so little inclined to part with it, that, though he had passed, and noticed in passing, the tailor's shop to which he had been recommended by the porter, he still walked on. It was not until he had made a circuit of the old churchyard at the end of the town, where even on summer days the wind is generally at play, and where on winter nights it ramps and rages in a manner terrible to hear and feel, that George Dallas began to comprehend the necessity of at once procuring some warmer clothing, and, turning back, made straight for the tailor's shop.

A neat, clean-looking shop, with "Evans, Tailor," painted over the window, the effect being slightly spoiled by the knob of the roller blind, which formed a kind of full-stop in the middle of the word "Tail. or," and divided it into two unequal portions; with "Evans, Tailor," blazing from its brass door-plate; with "Evans,

Tailor," inscribed with many twisted flourishes on its wire blind, where it emerged coyly from "Liveries" preceding it, and took hasty refuge in "Uniforms" at its conclusion. Evans himself behind the counter, a fat, chubby, rosy little man, with clustering iron-gray hair round his temples, and a bit of round scalp wig fitting, like the lid of a teapot, into a bald place on his crown. Apparently he had been all his life tailoring to such an extent for other people as to have had no time to attend to himself, for he stood behind the counter this winter's day in his shirt sleeves, and without his coat.

The old man bowed as George Dallas entered the shop, and asked him what they could do for him. Dallas replied that he wanted a warm thick overcoat, "if they'd got such a thing."

"Such a thing! Well, there may be such a thing, perhaps, but I'm not certain, not being an article kept in stock," replied Mr Evans, "which is mostly tarpaulin for the railway guards and stokers, likewise canal boatmen, which is often customers. A warm thick overcoat," repeated the old man, "is a article generally made to order, though I've a sort of a recollection of a something of the kind returned on our hands in consequence of the party which was staying at the Lion having left unexpected. Let me see!" he continued, opening two or three drawers. "I ain't so young as I was, sir, and I'm touched in the wind; and this nasty gas which we've only had this winter don't do for me, making me bust out in sudden persperation. Ho! I thought so! Here's a warm thick overcoat, blue Witney, lined with plaid; that's a article I can recommend; our own make; we ain't ashamed of it, you see!" and he pointed to a label stitched inside just below the collar, where the inevitable "Evans, Tailor," in gilt letters, was supplemented by the address, "Amherst."

George Dallas took the coat and slipped it on. It fitted tolerably, and was thick and warm. "What is the price?" he asked.

"We can do that for you at fifty-three and six," said the old man. "It was a three-pounder, that coat was, when made for the party at the Lion, but we'll make a reduction now. Fifty-three and six, and our own make. You couldn't do better."

"I dare say not," said Dallas absently. "Please to change this for me."

At the sight of the bank note Mr Evans's pleasant face became a little clouded. He did not relish the notion of changing notes for persons with whom he had no previous acquaintance. But after he had taken the note in his hand and held it between his eyes and the light, and flattened it out on the counter, his cheerful expression returned, and he said, "All right, sir. I'll change it and welcome! I know where you got this note, sir! Ah, you may start, but I do! You got it from our post-office, lower down the street; here's the post-office stamp on it which they're compelled to put on every note passing through their hands. Look, 'Amherst, B. 1, Jan. 30.' Thank you, sir; six and six's, three and seven is ten; thank you, sir!" and the old man, having counted the change from a cash-box in a desk at the back of the shop, hurried round to open the door and bow his customer out.

Within half an hour George Dallas was in the train on his return to London.

CHAPTER III.

THE PHILISTINES.

THE cold weather, which in the country produced rugged roads and ice-bound ponds; which frosted the leafless branches of the trees with a silver tint, and gave a thousand different fantastic but ever lovely hues and shapes to nature; had no such pleasant refreshing effect in London, where the frost, ere three hours old, was beaten into mud under foot, ran drizzling in dirty streams from house-tops, and subsided into rain and fog before the daylight had disappeared. The day succeeding that on which George Dallas had entered the town of Amherst was a thorough specimen of what London can do when put to its worst. It was bad in the large

thoroughfares where the passing crowds jostled each other ill-temperedly, digging at each other's umbrellas, and viciously contesting every inch of foot pavement, where the omnibus-wheels revolved amid mud-ruts, and every passing cab-horse produced a fountain of slush and spray. But it was even worse in the by-streets, where an attempt at sweeping had been made, where the mud lay in a thick slimy, shiny tide between the narrow ridges of footpath, where the tall houses, so close together that they completely filtered the air and light and retained nothing but the darkness and the dirt, were splashed with mud to their first-floor windows, and whose inhabitants or visitors desirous of crossing the road had to proceed to the junction with the main street, and, after tacking across in comparative cleanliness, commence their descent on the opposite side.

In the front room of the first floor of a house in such a street, South Molton-street, connecting Oxford-street the plebeian with Brook-street the superb, just as the feeble glimmer of daylight which had vouchsafed itself during the day was beginning to wax even feebler, previous to its sudden departure, a man sat astride a chair, sunk in thought. He had apparently just entered, for he still wore his hat and overcoat, though the former was pushed to the back of his head, and the latter thrown negligently open. He was a tall handsome man, with keen black eyes glancing sharply, with thick black brows, a long straight nose, thin tight lips unshrouded by moustache or beard, and a small round chin. He had full flowing black whiskers, and the blue line round his mouth showed that the beard was naturally strong; had he suffered it to grow he might have passed for an Italian. As it was, there was no mistaking him for anything but an Englishman—darker, harder-looking than most of his race, but an Englishman. His face, especially round the eyes, was flushed and marked and lined, telling of reckless dissipation. There was a something not exactly fast, but yet slangy, in the cut of his clothes and in the manner in which he wore them; his attitude as he sat at the window with his hands clasped in front of him over the back rail of his chair, his knees straight out and his feet drawn back, as a man sits a horse at a hunt, was in its best aspect suggestive of the mess-room: in its

worst, of the billiard-room. And yet there was an indescribable something in the general aspect of the man, in the very ease of his position, in the shape of the hands clasped in front of him, in the manner, slight as it was, in which now and again he would turn on his chair and peer back into the darkness behind him, by which you would have known that he had had a refined education, and had been conversant with the manners of society.

Nor would you have been wrong. In Burke's Landed Gentry, the Rouths of Carr Abbey take up their full quota of pages, and when the county election for Herefordshire comes off, the liberal agent is forced to bring to bear all the science he can boast of, to counteract the influence which the never-failing adhesion of the old family throws into the Tory scale. Never having risen, never for an instant having dreamed of demeaning themselves by rising, above the squirearchy, owners of the largest and best herds in all that splendid cattle-breeding county, high-sheriffs and chairmen of quarter-sessions, as though by prescriptive right, perpetual presidents of agricultural societies, and in reality taking precedence immediately after the lord-lieutenant, the Rouths of Carr Abbey, from time immemorial, have sent their sons to Oxford and their daughters to court, and have never, save in one instance, had to blush for their children.

Save in one instance. The last entry in the old family Bible of Carr Abbey is erased by a thick black line. The old squire speaks habitually of "My only son, William;" and should a stranger, dining at the Abbey, casually refer to the picture, by Lawrence, of two little boys, one riding a pony, the younger decking a dog's neck with ribbon, he is, if the squire had not heard his question, motioned in dumb show to silence, or is replied to by the squire himself that "that boy is—lost, sir."

That boy, Stewart Routh, the man looking out of the window in South Molton-street, was captain of the boat at Eton, and first favourite, for a time, both with the dons and undergraduates at Oxford. Rumours of high play at cards developing into fact of perpetually sported "oak," non-attendance at chapel, and frequent shirking of classes, lessened the esteem in which Mr Routh was held by the authorities; and a written confession handed to the

dean, after being obtained by parental pressure, from Mr Albert Grüntz, of Christ Church, son of and heir to Mr Jacob Grüntz, sugar-baker, of St Mary Axe, in the city of London, and Balmoral-gardens, Hyde-park, a confession to the effect that he, Mr A. Grüntz, had lost the sum of two thousand pounds to Mr S. Routh, at a game played with dice, and known as French hazard, procured the dismissal of Mr S. Routh from the seat of learning. At Carr Abbey, whither he retired, his stay was shortened by the arrival of another document from Oxford, this time signed by Lord Hawkhurst, gentleman commoner of Christ Church, and Arthur Wardroper, of Balliol, setting forth that Mr S. Routh, while playing hazard in Mr Grüntz's rooms, had been caught there *in flagrante delicto* in the act of cheating by "securing," *i. e.* retaining in his fingers, one of the dice which he should have shaken from the box. It was the receipt of this letter that caused the squire to make the erasure in the family Bible, and to look upon his youngest son as dead.

Driven from the paternal roof, Mr Stewart Routh descended upon the pleasant town of Boulogne, whence, after a short stay not unmarked by many victories over the old and young gentlemen who frequent the card-tables at the Etablissement des Bains, from whom he carried off desirable trophies, he proceeded to the baths and gambling-houses of Ems, Homburg, and Baden-Baden. It was at the last-mentioned place, and when in the very noon and full tide of success, that he was struck down by a fever, so virulent that the affrighted servants of the hotel refused to wait upon him. No nurse could be prevailed upon to undertake to attend him; and he would have been left to die for want of proper care, had not a young Englishwoman, named Harriet Creswick, travelling in the capacity of nursery-governess to Lord de Mauleverer's family (then passing through Baden on their way to winter in Rome), come to the rescue. Declaring that her countryman should not perish like a dog, she there and then devoted herself to attendance on the sick man. It need scarcely be told that Lady de Mauleverer, protesting against "such extraordinary conduct," intimated to Miss Creswick that her connection with her noble charges must cease at once and for ever. But it is noteworthy that in such a

man as Stewart Routh had hitherto proved himself, a spirit of gratitude should have been so strongly aroused, that when his sense and speech returned to him, in weak and faltering accents he implored the woman who had so tenderly nursed him through his illness, to become his wife. It is quite needless to say that his friends, on hearing of it, averred, some that he thought he was going to die, and that it did not matter to him what he did, while it might have pleased the young lady; others, that he was a particularly knowing card, whose brains had never deserted him, even when he was at his worst, and that he had discovered in Harriet Creswick a woman exactly fitted, by physical and mental qualification, efficiently to help him as his partner in playing the great game of life. Be it as it may—and people will talk, especially in such circles—the fact remains that on his sick couch at the *Hollandischer Hof*, Baden-Baden, Stewart Routh proposed to Harriet Creswick and was accepted; that so soon as he could safely be left she departed for England; and that within a month they were married in London.

Of that one event at least in all his eventful life, Stewart Routh had never repented. Through all his vicissitudes of fortune his wife had been by his side, and as, in the long run, chance had been against him, taking the heaviest portion of his burden on herself. Harriet Routh's was an untiring, undying, unquestioning love or worship of her husband. The revelation of his—to say the least of it—loose mode of life, the shifts and expedients to which he resorted for getting money, the questionable company in which he habitually lived, would have told with fatal effect on a devotion less thorough, a passion more transient. Harriet herself, who had been brought up staidly at an Institution, which she had only quitted to join the family with whom she was travelling when she arrived at Baden—Harriet herself at first shrunk back stunned and stupefied by the revelation of an unknown life which burst upon her a few days after her marriage. But her love bore her through it. As the dyer's hand assimilates to that it works in, so gradually did Harriet Routh endue herself with her husband's tone, temper, and train of thought, until, having become almost his second self, she was his most trusted ally, his safest counsellor

in all the strange schemes by which he made out life. In the early days after their marriage she had talked to him once, only once, and then but for a few minutes, of reformation, of something better and more reputable, of doing with less money, to be obtained by the exercise of his talents in some legitimate manner. And her husband, with the nearest approach to harshness that before or since he had ever assumed, told her that his time for that kind of thing was passed and gone for ever, that she must forget all the childish romance that they had taught her at the Institution, that she must sink or swim with him, and be prepared to cast in her lot with that kind of existence which had become his second nature, and out of which he could never hope to move. Even if he could move from it, he added, he did not think that he would wish to do so, and there must be an end to the matter.

There was an end to the matter. From that time forth, Harriet Routh buried her past, buried her former self, and devoted herself, soul and body, to her husband. Her influence over him strengthened with each year that they lived together, and was traceable in many ways. The fact once faced, that their precarious livelihood was to be earned by the exercise of sharpness superior to that enjoyed by those with whom they were brought into contact, Harriet laid herself out at once for the fulfilment of her new duties, and in a very short time compelled her husband's surprised laudation of the ease and coolness with which she discharged them. There were no other women in that strange society; but if there had been, Harriet would have queened it over them, not merely by her beauty, but by her bright spirit, her quick appreciation, her thorough readiness to enter exactly into the fancy of the moment. The men who lost their money to Routh and his companion treated her not merely with a punctilio which forbade the smallest verbal excess, but bore their losses with comparative good humour so long as Mrs Routh was present. The men who looked up to Routh as the arch-concocter of and prime mover in all their dark deeds, had a blind faith in her, and their first question, on the suggestion of any scheme, would be "what Mrs Routh thought of it." Ah, the change, the change! The favourite pupil of the Institution, who used to take such close notes of the sermon on

Sunday mornings, and illustrate the chaplain's meaning with such apposite texts from other portions of Scripture, as quite to astonish the chaplain himself, which perhaps was not to be wondered at, as the chaplain (a bibulous old gentleman, who had been appointed on the strength of his social qualities by the committee, who valued him as "a parson, you know, without any nonsense about him") was in the habit of purchasing his discourses ready made, and only just ran them through on Saturday nights. The show pupil of the Institution, who did all kinds of arithmetical problems "in her head," by which the worthy instructors meant without the aid of paper and pencil—the staid and decorous pupil of the Institution, who, when after her last examination she was quitting the table loaded with prizes—books—was called back by the bishop of the diocese, who with feeble hands pinned a silver medal on to her dress, and said, in a trembling voice, "I had nearly forgotten the best of all. This is in testimony of your excellent conduct, my dear." What was become of this model miss? She was utilizing her talents in a different way. That was all. The memory which had enabled her to summarize and annotate the chaplain's sermons now served as her husband's note-book, and was stored with all kinds of odd information, "good things" to "come off," trials of horses, names and fortunes of heirs who had just succeeded to their estates, lists of their most pressing debts, names of the men who were supposed to be doubtful in money matters, and with whom it was thought inexpedient to bet or play—all these matters dwelt in Harriet Routh's brain, and her husband had only to turn his head and ask, "What is it, Harry?" to have the information at once. The arithmetical quickness stood her in good stead, in the calculation of odds on all kinds of sporting events, on the clear knowledge of which the success of most of Routh's business depended; and as for the good conduct—well, the worthy bishop would have held up his hands in pious horror at the life led by the favourite pupil of the Institution, and at her surroundings; but against Mrs Routh, as Mrs Routh, as the devoted, affectionate, self-denying, spotless wife, the veriest ribald in all that loose crew had never ventured to breathe a doubt.

Devoted and affectionate! See her now as she comes quietly

into the room—a small compact partridge of a woman with deep blue eyes in a very pale face, with smooth shining light brown hair falling on either side in two long curls, and gathered into a clump at the back of her head, with an impertinent nose only just redeemed from being a snub, with a small mouth, and a very provoking patable chin. See how she steals behind her husband, her dark linsey dress draping her closely and easily, and not making the slightest rustle; her round arm showing its symmetry in her tight sleeve twining round his neck; her plump shapely hand resting on his head; her pale cheek laid against his face. Devoted and affectionate! No simulation here.

"Anything gone wrong, Stewart?" she asked, in a very sweet voice.

"No, dear. Why?" said Routh, who was now sitting at a table strewn with papers, a pen in his right hand, and his left supporting his handsome worn face.

"You looked gloomy, I thought; but, if you say so, it's all right," returned his wife, cheerfully, leaving his side as she spoke, and proceeding to sweep up the hearth, put on fresh coals, and make the whole room look comfortable, with a few rapid indefinable touches. Then she sat down in a low chair by the fire, perfectly still, and turned her calm pale face to her husband with a business-like air. He made some idle scratches with his pen in silence, then threw it down, and, suddenly pushing away his chair, began to walk up and down the room with long light strides.

"What do you make of Deane, Harriet?" he said, at length, stopping for a moment opposite his wife, and looking closely at her.

"How do you mean? In character or in probabilities? As regards himself, or as regards us?"

"Well, both. I cannot make him out; he is so confoundedly cool, and so infernally sharp. He might be a shrewd man of business, bent on making a fortune, and a good way on the road to his object; and yet he's nothing but a man of pleasure, of what your *good* people would call a wretched low kind of pleasure too, and is spending the fortune instead."

"I don't think so, Stewart," his wife said, quietly and impress-

ively. "I don't think Mr Deane is spending any very considerable portion of his fortune, whatever it may be."

Stewart had resumed his walking up and down, but listened to her attentively.

"I regard him as a curious combination of the man of business with the man of pleasure. I don't know that we have ever met exactly the kind of person before. He is as calculating in his pleasures as other men are in their business."

"I hate the man," said Routh, with an angry frown and a sullen gesture.

"That's dangerous, Stewart," said Harriet. "You should not allow yourself either to hate or to like any one in whom you are speculating. If you do the one, it will make you incautious; if you do the other, scrupulous. Both are unwise. I do not hate Mr Deane."

"Fortunately for him, Harry. I think a man would be a great deal safer with my hatred than with yours."

"Possibly," she said, simply, and the slightest smile just parted her crimson lips, and showed a momentary gleam of her white, small, even teeth. "But I do not hate him. I think about him, though; because it is necessary that I should, and I fancy I have found out what he really is."

"Have you, by Jove?" interrupted Routh. "Then you've done a clever thing, Harriet—clever even for you; for of all the close and impenetrable men I ever met, Deane's the closest and the hardest. When I'm with him, I always feel as if he were trying to *do* me somehow, and as if he would succeed too, though that's not easy. He's as mean as a Scotch shopkeeper, as covetous as a Jew, as wide awake as a Yankee. There's a coolness and a constant air of avowed suspicion about him that drives me mad."

"And yet you ought to have been done with temper and with squeamishness long ago," said Harriet, in a tone of quiet conviction. "How often have you told me, Stewart, that to us, in our way of life, every man must be a puppet, prized in proportion to the readiness with which he dances to our pulling? What should *we* care? I am rendered anxious and uneasy by what you say."

She kept silence for a few moments, and then asked him, in a changed tone,

"How does your account with him stand?"

"My account!—ah, there's the rub! He's so uncommonly sharp, that there's little to be done with him. The fellow's a blackguard—more of a blackguard than I am, I'll swear, and as much of a swindler, at least, in his capacity for swindling. Only I dare say he has never had occasion to reduce it to practice. And yet there's a hardly veiled insolence in his manner to me, at times, for which I'd like to blow his brains out. He tells me, as plainly as if he said it in words, that he pays me a commission on his pleasures, such as are of my procuring, but that he knows to a penny what he intends to pay, and is not to be drawn into paying a penny more."

Harriet sat thoughtful, and the faintest flush just flickered on her cheek. "Who are his associates, when he is not with you?"

"He keeps that as close as he keeps everything else," replied Routh; "but I have no doubt he makes them come cheap, if indeed he does not get a profit out of them."

"You are taking my view of him, Stewart," said Harriet; then she added, "He has some motive for acting with such caution, no doubt; but a flaw may be found in his armour, when we think fit to look for it. In the mean time, tell me what has set you thinking of him?"

"Dallas's affair, Harriet. I am sorry the poor fellow lost his money to *him*. Hang it, I'm such a bad fellow myself, so utterly gone a 'coon" (his wife winced, and her pale face turned paler), "that it comes ill from me to say so, and I wouldn't, except to you. But I am devilish sorry Deane got the chance of cleaning Dallas out. I like the boy; he's a stupid fool, but not half bad, and he didn't deserve such an ill turn of fortune."

"Well," said Harriet, "take comfort in remembering that you helped him."

She spoke very coldly, and evidently was a stranger to the feelings which actuated Routh.

"You don't care about it, that's clear," he remarked.

He was standing still now, leaning against the mantelpiece. She rose and approached him.

"No, Stewart," she said, in her calm sweet voice, which rose a little as she went on, "I do not. I care for nothing on earth (and I never look beyond this earth) but *you*. I have no interest, no solicitude, for any other creature. I cannot feel any, and it is well. Nothing but this would do in my case."

She stood and looked at him with her deep blue eyes, with her hands folded before her, and with a sober seriousness in her face confirmatory of the words she had spoken. He looked at her until she turned away, and a keen observer might have seen in his face the very slightest expression of impatience.

"Shall we go into those accounts now?" said Harriet; "we shall just have time for it, before you go to Flinders'."

She sat down, as she spoke, before a well-appointed writing table, and, drawing a japan box towards her, opened it, and took out a number of papers. Routh took a seat beside her, and they were soon deep in calculations which would have had little interest or meaning for a third person, had there been one present. By degrees, Routh's face darkened, and many times he uttered angry oaths; but though Harriet watched him narrowly, and felt in every nerve the annoyance under which he was labouring, she preserved her calm manner, and went steadily on with her task; condensing the contents of several papers into brief memoranda, carefully tearing up the originals, and placing the little heaps methodically beside her for consignment to the fire. At length Routh again stood up, and lounged against the mantelpiece.

"All these *must* be paid, then, Harry?" he asked, as he lighted a cigar, and began to smoke sullenly.

"Yes," she answered, cheerfully. "You know, dear, it has always been our rule, as it has hitherto constituted our safety, to stand well with our tradespeople, and pay *them*, at least, punctually. We have never been so much behindhand; and as you are about to take a bolder flight than usual, it is doubly necessary that we should be untrammelled. Fancy Flinders getting snubbed by the

landlady, or your being arrested for your tailor's bills, at the time when the new Company is coming out!"

"Hang it! the bills all seem to be mine," growled Routh. "Where are yours? Haven't you got any?"

It would have been difficult to induce an unseen witness to believe how utterly unscrupulous, remorseless, conscienceless a woman Harriet Routh had become, if he had seen the smile with which she answered her husband's half-admiring, half-querulous question.

"You know, dear, I don't need much. I have not to keep up appearances as you have. You are in the celebrated category of those who cannot afford to be anything but well-dressed. It's no matter for me, but it's a matter of business for you."

"Ah! I might have known you'd have some self-denying, sensible reason ready; but the puzzle to me is, that you always *are* well dressed. By Jove, you're the neatest woman I know, and the prettiest!"

The smile upon her face brightened, but she only shook her head, and went on:

"If Dallas does not get the money, or at least some of it, what do you propose to do? I don't know."

"Do you think he will get the money, Harry? He told *you* all about it. What are the odds?"

"I cannot even guess. All depends on his mother. If she is courageous, and fond of him, she will get it for him, even supposing her immediate control as small as she believes it to be. If she is not courageous, her being fond of him will do very little good, and women are mostly cowards," said Harriet composedly.

"I never calculated much on the chance," said Routh, "and indeed it would be foolish to take the money if he got it—in that way, at least; for though I am sorry Deane profited by the young fellow, that's because I hate Deane. It's all right, for my purpose, that Dallas should be indebted as largely as may be to me. He's useful in more ways than one; his connection with the press serves our turn, Harry, doesn't it? Especially when you work it so well, and give him such judicious hints, such precious confidences."

(Even such praise as this, the woman's perverted nature craved and prized.) "You won't need to take the money from him in formal payment," she said, "if that's what you want to avoid. If he returns with that sum in his pocket, he will not be long before he—"

A knock at the door interrupted her, and George Dallas entered the room.

He looked weary and dispirited, and, before the customary greetings had been exchanged, Routh and Harriet saw that failure had been the result of experiment. Harriet's eyes sought her husband's face, and read in it the extent of his discomfiture; and the furtive glance she turned on Dallas was full of resentment. But it found no expression in her voice as she asked him commonplace questions about his journey, and busied herself in setting a chair for him by the fire, putting his hat aside, and begging him to take off his overcoat. He complied. As he threw the coat on a chair, he said, with a very moderately successful attempt at pleasantry:

"I have come back richer than I went, Mrs Routh, by that elegant garment, and no more."

"Bowled out, eh?" asked Routh, taking the cigar from his mouth, and laying it on the mantel-piece.

"Stumped, sir," replied Dallas.

Harriet said nothing.

"That's bad, Dallas."

"Very bad, my dear fellow, but very true. Look here," the young man continued, with earnestness, "I don't know what to do. I don't, upon my soul! I saw my mother—"

"Yes?" said Harriet going up to his side. "Well?"

"I saw her and—and she is unable to help me; she is, indeed, Mrs Routh," for a bitter smile was on Harriet's face, turned full upon his. "She hasn't the means. I never understood her position until last night, but I understood it then. She is—" he stopped. All his better nature forbade his speaking of his mother's position to these people. Her influence, the gentler, better influence, was over him still. However transitory it might prove, it had not passed yet. Harriet Routh knew as well as he did what the impulse was that arrested his speech.

"You will tell me all about it yet," she thought, and not a sign of impatience appeared in her face.

"I—I need not bore you with details," he went on. "She could not give me the money. She made me understand that. But she promised to get it for me, in some way or other, if the thing is within the reach of possibility, before a month expires. I know she will do it, but I must give her time, if it's to be forthcoming, and you must give me time."

"It's unfortunate, Dallas," Routh began, in a cold voice, "and, of course, it's all very well your talking to me about giving you time, but how am *I* to get it? It's no good going over the old story, you know it as well as I do. There, there," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "I must try and get old Shadrach to renew. I suppose we may as well go at once, Dallas." He left the room, followed by Harriet.

George Dallas sat over the fire in an attitude of deep dejection. He was sick at heart, and the revulsion of feeling that had begun at Poynings had not yet ceased. "If I could but be done with it all!" he thought. "But I'm in the groove, I'm in the groove."

"Come along, George," said Routh, who seemed more good-humoured than before, as he re-entered the room, soberly attired, as became a man going to do business in the City. "Don't be down-hearted; the old lady will keep her word. Don't be afraid; and in the mean time, we'll pull through. Put your coat on, and come along. You'll give us some dinner, Harriet, won't you? And if Deane calls, ask him to join us. He won't," he continued, with a laugh, "because he believes in tavern dinners, and puts no faith in ours. We're snobs who live in lodgings, George, you know; but he'll drop in in the evening fast enough."

The application to Mr Shadrach proved successful, and George Dallas returned with Stewart Routh to his lodgings, more firmly tied to him than ever, by the strong bond of an increased money-obligation.

"Pretty tidy terms, weren't they?" Routh asked Dallas, when he had told Harriet, in answer to her anxious questioning, that the "renewal" had been arranged.

"Very tidy indeed," said poor George, ruefully: "but, Routh, suppose when I do get the money, it's not enough. What's to be done then?"

"Never mind about *then*," said Routh, "*now* is the important matter. Remember that every *then* is made of *nows*, and keep your mind easy. That's philosophy, as Mr Squeers says. Your present business is to eat your dinner."

Stewart Routh had thrown off his low spirits, and had all but succeeded in rousing George Dallas from his. Kindly, convivial, only occasionally coarse, he was a dangerously pleasant man at all times, and especially so to George Dallas when Harriet was present; for then his coarseness was entirely laid aside, and her tact, humour, intelligence never failed to please, to animate, and to amuse him. The dinner was a very pleasant one, and, before it had come to a conclusion, George Dallas began to yield as completely as ever to the influence of the man whose enviable knowledge of "life" had been the first medium through which he had attained it. George had forgotten the renewed bill and his late failure for a while, when the mention of Deane's name recalled it to his memory.

"Has Deane been here, Harry?" asked Routh.

"No, Stewart, I have been at home all day, but he has not called."

"Ah—didn't happen to want me, no doubt."

"Have you seen much of him lately, Routh?" inquired George Dallas. "I mean, within the last week or two? While I—while I've been keeping out of the way?" he said, with a nervous laugh.

"Poor boy, you *have* been down on your luck," said Routh. "Seen much of Deane? Oh, yes; he's always about—he's here most days, some time in the forenoon."

"In the forenoon, is he? Considering the hours he keeps at night, that surprises me."

"It doesn't surprise *me*. He's very strong—has a splendid constitution, confound him, and has not given it a shake yet. Drink doesn't seem to 'trouble' him in the least."

"He's an odd fellow," said George, thoughtfully. "How coolly

he won my money, and what a greenhorn I was, to be sure! I wonder if he would have lost his own so coolly."

"Not a doubt of it," said Routh; "he'd have been satisfied he would make it up out of something else. He *is* an odd fellow, and a deuced unpleasant fellow to *my* mind."

Harriet looked at her husband with a glance of caution. It was unlike Routh to dwell on a mere personal feeling, or to let so much of his mind be known unnecessarily. He caught the glance and understood it, but it only angered, without otherwise influencing him.

"A low-lived loafer, if ever there was one," he went on, "but useful in his way, Dallas. Every man has a weakness; *his* is to think himself a first-rate billiard player, while he is only a fourth-rate. A man under such a delusion is sure to lose his money to any one who plays better than he does, and I may as well be that man, don't you see?"

"I see perfectly," said George; "but I wish he had been equally mistaken in his notions of his card-playing science; it would have made a serious difference to me."

"Never mind, old fellow," answered Routh; "you shall have your revenge some day. Finish your wine, and Harriet shall give us some music."

She did so. She gave them some music, such as very few can give—music which combines perfection of art with true natural feeling. This woman was a strange anomaly, full of "treasons, stratagema, and spoils," and yet with music in her soul.

Rather early, George Dallas left the pair, but they sat up late, talking earnestly. Things were going ill with Stewart Routh. Some of his choicest and most promising combinations had failed. He had once or twice experienced a not uncommon misfortune in the lot of such men as he;—he had encountered men in his own profession who were as clever as himself, and who, favoured by circumstances and opportunity, had employed their talents at his expense. The swindler had been swindled once or twice, the biter had been bitten, and his temper had not been improved in the process. He was about, as Harriet had said, to take a new flight this time, in the direction of operations on the general public, and

he had formed designs on Mr Deane, which did not, in the increased knowledge he had obtained of that gentleman's character, and in the present aspect of affairs, look quite so promising as in the early stage of their acquaintance, six weeks before. The operations of gentlemen of the Routh fraternity are planned and executed with a celerity which seems extraordinary to pursuers of the more legitimate branches of industry. Routh had not passed many hours in Mr Deane's society (they had met at a low place of amusement, the honours of which Routh was doing to a young Oxonian, full of cash and devoid of brains, whom he had in hand just then), before he had built an elaborate scheme upon the slender foundation of that gentleman's boasted wealth and assumed greenness. His subsequent experience had convinced him of the reality of the first, but had shown him his mistake as to the last, and gradually his mind, usually cool and undaunted, became haunted by an ever-burning desire to possess himself of the money for ever flaunted before his eyes—became haunted, too, by an unreasonable and blind animosity to the stranger, who combined profligacy with calculation, unscrupulous vice with well-regulated economy, and the unbridled indulgence of his passions with complete coldness of heart and coolness of temper. Routh had no knowledge of Deane's real position in life, but he had a conviction that had it been, like his own, that of a professional swindler, he would have been a dangerous rival, quite capable of reducing his own occupation and his own profits very considerably. Therefore Routh hated him.

When the conference between Routh and Harriet came to a conclusion, it left the woman visibly troubled. When Routh had been for some time asleep, she still sat by the table, on which her elbows rested, her head on her hands, and the light shining on her fair brown hair. There she sat, until the fire died out, and the late wintry dawn came. She was not unused to such watches; wakefulness was habitual to her, and care had often kept her company. But no vigil had ever tired her so much. Her mind was at work, and suffering. When at length she rose from her chair with an impatient shiver, dark circles were round her blue eyes, and her pure waxen complexion looked thick and yellow. She lighted a candle, turned the gas out, and went for a moment to the

window. The cold grey light was beginning to steal through the shutter, which she opened wide, and then looked out. She set the candle down, and leaned idly against the window. Weariness and restlessness were upon her. The street was quite empty, and the houses opposite looked inexpressibly gloomy. "One would think all the people in them were dead instead of asleep," she said, half aloud, as she pulled the blind down with a jerk, and turned away. She went slowly upstairs to her bed-room, and as she went, she murmured :

"Where will it end? How will it end? It is an awful risk !"

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE BALANCE.

NOT one word came from Mrs Carruthers for full six weeks. The hope which had sprung up in George Dallas's breast after the interview with his mother in the housekeeper's room had gone through the various stages common to unfulfilled desires in men of sanguine temperaments. It had been very bright at first, and when no letter came after the lapse of a week, it had begun to grow dim, and then he had endeavoured to reason with himself that the very fact of no letter coming ought to be looked upon as a good sign, as showing that "something was doing." Then the absence of any news caused his hope to flicker until the recollection of the old adage, that "no news was good news," made it temporarily bright again ; then as the time for payment of the renewed bill grew nearer and nearer, so did George Dallas's prospects become gloomier and yet more gloomy, and at last the light of hope went out, and the darkness of despair reigned paramount in his bosom. What could his mother be about? She must have pretended that she had some bill of her own to pay, and that the money was immediately required ; old Carruthers must have questioned her about

it, and there must have been a row ; she must have tried to "collar" the amount out of the housekeeping—no ! the sum was too large ; that was absurd ! She had old friends—people who knew and loved her well, and she must have asked some of them to lend it to her, and probably been refused ; old friends always refuse to lend money. She must have tried—confound it all, he did not know, he could not guess what she had tried ! All he did know, to his sorrow, was, that she had not sent the money ; all he knew, to his joy, was, that though he was constantly seeing Stewart Routh, that worthy lad, as yet, uttered no word of discontent at its non-appearance.

Not he ! In the hand which Stewart Routh was at that moment playing in the greater game of life, the card representing a hundred and forty pounds was one on which he bestowed very little attention. It might, or it might not, form part of the odd trick, either way : but it had very little influence on his strategy and finesse. There were times when a five-pound note might have turned his chance, but this was not one of them. Driven into a corner, pressed for the means of discharging paltry debts, harassed by dunning creditors, Stewart Routh would have needed and claimed the money due to him by George Dallas. Present circumstances were more favourable, and he only needed George Dallas's assistance in his schemes. For, Stewart Routh's measures for raising money were of all kinds and of all dimensions ; the elephant's trunk of his genius could pick up a five-pound-note bet from a flat at *écarté*, or could move the lever of a gigantic city swindle. And he was "in for a large thing" just at this time. Men attending professionally at the betting-ring at the great steeple-chase then coming off, noticed Routh's absence with wonder, and though he occasionally looked in at two or three of the second-rate sporting clubs of which he was a member, he was listless and preoccupied. If he took a hand at cards, though from mere habit he played closely and cautiously, yet he made no great points, and was by no means, as usual, the dashing Paladin round whose chair men gathered thickly, and whose play they backed cheerily. No ! The paltry gains of the dice-box and cards paled before the glamour of the fortune to be made in companies and shares ; the elephant's

trunk was to show its strength now, as well as its dexterity, and the genius which had hitherto been confined to "bridging" a pack of cards, or "securing" a die, talking over a flat or winning money of a greenhorn, was to have its vent in launching a great City Company. Of this scheme Dallas knew nothing. A disinherited man, with neither name nor influence, would have been utterly useless ; but he was reserved for possible contingencies. Routh was always sending to him to call, always glad to see him when he called, and never plagued him with allusions to his debt. But in their interviews nothing but mere generalities were discussed, and George noticed that he always received a hint to go whenever Mr Deane was announced.

But although Stewart Routh was seen but seldom in his usual haunts, he was by no means inactive or neglectful of his own interests. Day after day he spent several hours in the City, diligently engaged in the formation of his new Company, a grand undertaking for working some newly-discovered silver mines in the Brazils ; and day after day were his careful scheming, his elaborate plotting, his vivacious daring, and his consummate knowledge of the world, rewarded by the steady progress which the undertaking made. The temporary offices in Tokenhouse-yard were besieged with inquirers ; good brokers with City names of high standing offered their services ; splendid reports came from the engineers, who had been sent out to investigate the state of the mines. Only one thing was wanting, and that was capital ; capital, by hook or by crook, Mr Stewart Routh must have, and was determined to have. If the affair were to be launched, the brokers said, the next week must see it done ; and the difficulty of raising the funds for the necessary preliminary expenses was becoming day by day more and more palpable and insurmountable to Stewart Routh.

The interval of time that had witnessed so much activity on the part of Mr Stewart Routh, and had advanced his schemes close to a condition of imminent crisis, had been productive of nothing new or remarkable in the existence of George Dallas. That is to say, on the surface of it. He was still leading the desultory life of a man who, with an intellectual and moral nature capable of better deeds and nobler aspirations, is incurably weak, impulsive, and

swayed by a love of pleasure ; a man incapable of real self-control, and with whom the gratification of the present is potent, above all suggestions or considerations of the contingencies of the future. He worked a little, and his talent was beginning to tell on the popularity of the paper for which he worked, *The Mercury*, and on the perceptions of its proprietors. George Dallas was a man in whose character there were many contradictions. With much of the fervour of the poetic temperament, with its sensuousness and its sensitiveness, he had a certain nonchalance about him, a fitful indifference to external things, and a spasmodic impatience of his surroundings. This latter was apt to come over him at times when he was apparently merriest, and it had quite as much to do with his anxiety to get his debt to Routh discharged, and to set himself free from Routh, as any moral sense of the danger of keeping such company, or any moral consciousness of the waste of his life, and the deterioration of his character. George Dallas had no knowledge of the true history of Routh's career ; of the blacker shades of his character he was entirely ignorant. In his eyes Routh was a clever man and a good-for-nothing, a "black sheep" like himself, a sheep for whose blackness Dallas (as he did in his own case) held circumstances, the white sheep, anything and everything except the man himself, to blame. He was dimly conscious that his associate was stronger than he, stronger in will, stronger in knowledge of men, and somehow, though he never defined or acknowledged the feeling to himself, he mistrusted and feared him. He liked him, too, he felt grateful to him for his help ; he did not discern the interested motives which actuated him, and, indeed, they were but small, and would by no means have accounted for all Routh's proceedings towards Dallas. Nor is it necessary that they should ; a villain is not, therefore, altogether precluded from likings, or even the feebler forms of friendship, and Dallas was not simply silly and egotistical when he believed that Routh felt kindly and warmly towards him. Still, whether a merciful and occult influence was at work within him or the tide of his feelings had been turned by his stolen interview with his mother, by his being brought into such positive contact with her life and its conditions, and having been made to realize the bitterness he

had infused into it, it were vain to inquire. Whatever his motives, however mixed their nature or confused their origin, he was filled, whenever he was out of Routh's presence, and looked his life in the face, with an ardent longing to "cut the whole concern," as he phrased it in his thoughts. And Harriet?—for the "whole concern" included her, and he was forced to remember—Harriet, the only woman whose society he liked—Harriet, whom he admired with an admiration as pure and respectful as he could have felt for her, had he met her in the least equivocal, nay, even in the most exalted position. Well, he would be very sorry to lose Harriet, but, after all, she cared only for Routh; and he was dangerous. "I must turn over a new leaf, for *her* sake" (he meant for his mother's); "and I can't turn it while they are at my elbows." From which conviction on the part of George it is sufficiently evident that Routh and Harriet had ample reason to apprehend that Dallas, on whom they desired to retain a hold, for more reasons than one, was slipping through their fingers.

George Dallas was more than usually occupied with such thoughts one morning, six weeks after his unsuccessful visit to Poynings. He had been very much with Routh and Deane during this period, and yet he had begun to feel aware, with a jealous and suspicious sense of it, too, that he really knew very little of what they had been about. They met in the evening, in pursuit of pleasure, and they abandoned themselves to it; or they met at Routh's lodgings, and Dallas surrendered himself to the charm which Harriet's society always had for him. But he had begun to observe of late that there was no reference to the occupation of the earlier part of the day, and that while there was apparently a close bond of mutual confidence or convenience between Routh and Deane, there was some under-current of mutual dislike.

"If my mother can only get me out of this scrape, and I can get the *Piccadilly* people to take my serial," said George Dallas to himself one morning, when April was half gone, and "the season" was half come, "I shall get away somewhere, and go in for work in earnest." He looked, ruefully enough, round the wretched little bed-room, at whose small window he was standing, as he spoke; and he thought impatiently of his debt to his coarse

shrewish landlady, and of the small liabilities which hampered him as effectually as the great one. It was later than his usual hour of rising, and he felt ill and despondent: not anxious to face the gay, rich, busy world outside, and still less inclined for his own company and waking thoughts in the shabby little den he tenanted. A small room, a mere apology for a sitting-room, was reached through a rickety folding-door, which no human ingenuity could contrive to keep shut if any one opened the other door leading to the narrow passage, and the top of the steep dark staircase. Through this yawning aperture George lounged disconsolately into the little room beyond, eyeing with strong disfavour the preparations for his breakfast, which preparations chiefly consisted of a dirty table-cloth and a portion of a stale loaf, popularly known as a "heel." But his gaze travelled further, and brightened; for on the cracked and blistered wooden chimney-piece lay a letter in his mother's hand. He darted at it, and opened it eagerly, then held it for a moment in his hand unread. His face turned very pale, and he caught his breath once or twice as he muttered:

"Suppose it's to say she can't do anything at all." But the fear, the suspense were over with the first glance at his mother's letter. She wrote:

"Poynings, 13th April, 1861.

"MY DEAR GEORGE,—I have succeeded in procuring you the money, for which you tell me you have such urgent need. Perhaps if I admired, and felt disposed to act up to, a lofty standard of sentimental generosity, I should content myself with making this announcement, and sending you the sum which you assure me will release you from your difficulties, and enable you to commence the better life on which you have led me to hope you are resolved. But not only do the circumstances under which I have contrived to get this money for you make it impossible for me to act in this way, but I consider I should be very wrong, and quite wanting in my duty, if I failed to make you understand, at the cost of whatever pain to myself, the price I have had to pay for the power of aiding you.

"You have occasioned me much suffering, George. You, my

only child, to whom I looked in the first dark days of my early bereavement, with such hope and pride as I cannot express, and as only a mother can understand—you have darkened my darkness and shadowed my joy, you have been the source of my deepest anxiety, though not the less for that, as you well know, the object of my fondest love. I don't write this to reproach you—I don't believe in the efficacy of reproach; but merely to tell you the truth—to preface another truth, the full significance of which it may prove very beneficial to you to understand. Sorrow I have known through you, and shame I have experienced for you. You have cost me many tears, whose marks can never be effaced from my face or my heart; you have cost me infinite disappointment, bitterness, heart-sickness, and domestic wretchedness; but now, for the first time, you cost me shame on my own account. Many and great as my faults and shortcomings have been through life, deceit was equally abhorrent to my nature and foreign to my habits. But for you, George, for your sake, to help you in this strait, to enable you to release yourself from the trammels in which you are held, I have descended to an act of deceit and meanness, the recollection of which must for ever haunt me with a keen sense of humiliation. I retain enough of my former belief in you, my son, to hope that what no other argument has been able to effect, this confession on my part may accomplish, and that you, recognizing the price at which I have so far rescued you, may pause, and turn from, the path leading downward into an abyss of ruin, from which no effort of mine could avail to snatch you. I have procured the money you require, by an expedient suggested to me accidentally, just when I had begun utterly to despair of ever being able to accomplish my ardent desire, by a conversation which took place at dinner between Mr Carruthers and his family solicitor, Mr Tatham. The conversation turned on a curious and disgraceful family story which had come under his knowledge lately. I need not trouble you to read, nor myself to write, its details; you will learn them when I see you, and give you the money; and I do not doubt, I dare not doubt, George, that you will feel all I expect you to feel when you learn to how deliberate, laborious, and mean a deception I have descended for your sake.

I can never do the same thing again ; the expedient is one that it is only possible to use once, and which is highly dangerous even in that one instance. So, if even you were bad and callous enough to calculate upon a repetition of it, which I could not believe, my own dear boy, I am bound to tell you that it never could be. Unless Mr Carruthers should change his mind, consequent upon an entire, radical, and most happy change in your conduct, all pecuniary assistance on my part must be entirely impossible. I say this, thus strongly, out of the kindest and best motives towards you. Your unexpected appearance and application agitated and distressed me very much ; not but that the sight of you, under any circumstances, must always give me pleasure, however closely pursued and overtaken by pain. For several days I was so completely upset by the recollection of your visit, and the strong and desperate necessity that existed for repressing all traces of such feelings, that I was unable to think over the expedients by which I might procure the money you required. Then as I began to grow a little quieter, accident gave me the hint upon which I have acted secretly and safely. Come down to Poynings in three days from this time. Mr Carruthers is at present away at an agricultural meeting at York, and I can see you at Amherst, without difficulty or danger. Go to the town, but not to the inn. Wait about until you see my carriage. This is the 13th. I shall expect you on the 17th, by which day I hope to have the money ready for you.

“ And now, my dear boy, how shall I end this letter? What shall I say? What can I say that I have not said again and again, and with sadly little effect, as you will not deny! But I forbear, and I hope. A feeling that I cannot define, an instinct, tells me that a crisis in my life is near. And what can such a crisis in my life mean, except in reference to you, my beloved and only child? In your hands lies all the future, all the disposition of the ‘few and evil’ years which remain to me. How are you going to deal with them? Is the love, which can never fail or falter, to be tried and wounded to the end, George, or is it to see any fruition in this world? Think over this question, my son, and let me read in your face, when I see you, that the answer is .

to be one of hope. You are much changed, George, the bitterness is succeeding the honey in your mouth; you are 'giving your strength for that which is not meat, and your labour for that which satisfieth not,' and though all the lookers-on at such a career as yours can see, and always do see, its emptiness and insufficiency plainly, what does their wisdom, their experience, avail? But if wisdom and experience come *to yourself*, that makes all the difference. If *you* have learned, and I venture to hope you *have*, that the delusive light is but a 'Will of the Wisp,' you will cease to pursue it. Come to me, then, my boy. I have kept my word to you, at such a cost as you can hardly estimate, seeing that no heart can impart *all* its bitterness to another; will you keep yours to me?

"C. L. CARRUTHERS."

"What does she mean? What can she mean?" George Dallas asked himself this question again and again, as he stood looking at the letter in his hand. "What *has* she done? A mean and deliberate deceit—some dishonourable transaction? My mother could not do anything deserving to be so called. It is impossible. Even if she could contemplate such a thing, she would not know how to set about it. God bless her!"

He sat down by the table, drew the dingy Britannia-metal teapot over beside his cup, and sat with his hand resting idly upon the distorted handle, still thinking less of the relief which the letter had brought him, than of the mysterious terms in which it was couched.

"She can't have got it out of Carruthers without his knowing anything about it!" he mused. "No; besides, getting it from *him* at all, is precisely the thing she told me she could not do. Well, I must wait to know; but how good of her to get it! Who's the fellow who says a man can have only one mother? By Jove, how right he is!"

Then George ate his breakfast hastily, and, putting the precious letter in his breast-pocket, went to Routh's lodgings.

"I dare say they're not up," he thought, as he knocked at the door, and patiently waited the lingering approach of the slipshod

servant. "Routh was as late as I was last night, and I know she always sits up for him."

He was right; they had not yet appeared in the sitting-room, and he had time for a good deal of walking up and down, and much cogitation over his mother's letter, before Harriet appeared. She was looking anxious, Dallas thought, so he stepped forward even more eagerly than usual, and told her in hurried tones of gladness that the post had brought him good news, and that his mother was going to give him the money.

"I don't know how she has contrived to get it, Mrs Routh," he said.

"Does she not tell you, then?" asked Harriet, as she eyed with some curiosity the letter which Dallas had taken out of his pocket, and which he turned about in his hand, as he stood talking to her. As she spoke, he replaced the letter in his pocket, and sat down.

"No," he answered, moodily, "she does not; but she did not get it easily, I know—not without a very painful self-sacrifice; but here's Routh."

"Ha! Dallas, my boy," said Routh, after he had directed one fleeting glance of inquiry towards his wife, and almost before he had fairly entered the room. "You're early—any news?"

"Very good news," replied Dallas; and he repeated the information he had already given Harriet. Routh received it with a somewhat feigned warmth, but Dallas was too much excited by his own feelings to perceive the impression which the news really produced on Routh.

"Is your letter from the great Mr Carruthers himself?" said Routh; "from the provincial magnate who has the honour of being step-father to you—your magnificent three-tailed bashaw?"

"Oh dear no!" said the young man grimly; "not from him. My letter is from my mother."

"And what has she to say?" asked Harriet quickly.

"She tells me she will very shortly be able to let me have the sum I require."

"The deuce she will!" said Routh. "Well, I congratulate you, my boy! I may say I congratulate all of us, for the matter

of that; but it's rather unexpected, isn't it? I thought Mrs Carruthers told you, when you saw her so lately, that the chances of her bleeding that charming person, her husband, were very remote."

"She did say so, and she was right; it's not from him she's going to get the money. Thank Heaven for that!"

"Certainly, if you wish it, though I'm not sure that we're right in being over-particular whence the money comes, so that it does come when one wants it. What is that example in the Eton Latin Grammar—'I came to her in season, which is the chief thing of all?' But if not from Mr Carruthers, where does she get the money?"

"I—I don't know; but she does not get it without some horrible self-sacrifice; you may depend on that."

"My dear George, Mrs Carruthers's case is not a singular one. We none of us get money without an extraordinary amount of self-sacrifice."

"Not a singular one! No, by George, you're right there, Routh," said the young man bitterly; "but does that make it any lighter for her to bear, or any better for me to reflect upon? There are hundreds of vagabond sons in England at this moment, I dare say, outcasts—sources of shame and degradation to their mothers, utterly useless to any one. I swear, when I think of what my mother must have gone through to raise this money, when I think of the purpose for which it is required, I thoroughly loathe myself, and feel inclined to put a pistol to my head or a razor to my throat. However, once free, I—there—that's the old cant again!"

As the young man said these words, he rose from his chair, and fell to pacing the room with long strides. Stewart Routh looked up sternly at him from under his bent brows, and was about to speak; but Harriet held up a finger deprecatingly, and when George Dallas seated himself again, and, with his face on his hands, remained moodily gazing at the table, she stole behind him and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"I know you would not intentionally wound *me*, Mr Dallas," she said. "I say, you would not intentionally wound *me*," she

repeated, apparently in answer to his turning sharply round and staring at her in surprise ; "but you seem to forget that it was I who counselled your recent visit to your mother, and suggested your asking her for this sum of money, which you were bound in honour to pay, and without the payment of which you—who have always represented yourself as most dear to her—would have been compromised for ever. I am sorry I did so, now that I see my intentions were misunderstood, and I say so frankly."

"I swear to you, Har—Mrs Routh—I had not the slightest idea of casting the least imputation on your motives ; I was only thinking— You know I'm a little hot on the subject of my mother, not without reason, perhaps, for she's been a perfect angel to me, and—one can't expect other people to enter into these things, and, of course, it was very absurd. But you must forget it, please, Mrs Routh, and you too, Stewart. If I spoke sharply or peevishly, don't mind it, old fellow !"

"I?" said Routh, with a crisp laugh. I *don't* mind it ; and I dare say I was very provoking ; but you see I never knew what it was to have a mother, and I'm not much indebted to my other parent. As to the money, George—these are hard times, but if the payment of it is to drive a worthy lady to distress, or is to promote discord between you and me, why, in friendship's name, keep it, I say !"

"You're a good fellow, Stewart," said Dallas, putting out his hand ; "and you, Mrs Routh, have forgiven me?" Though she only bowed her head slightly, she looked down into his face with a long, steady, earnest gaze. "There's an end of it, then, I trust," he continued ; "we never have had words here, and I hope we're not going to begin now. As for the money, that must be paid. Whatever my mother has had to do is as good as done, and need not be whined over. Besides, I know you want the money, Stewart."

"That's simply to say that I am in my normal state. I always want money, my dear George."

"You shall have this, at all events. And now I must be off, as I have some work to do for the paper. See you very soon again. Good-bye, Stewart. The cloud has quite passed away, Mrs Routh?"

She said "Quite," as she gave him her hand, and their eyes met. There was eager inquiry in his glance; there was calm, steadfast earnestness in hers. Then he shook hands with Routh, and left the room.

The moment the door closed behind him, the smile faded away from Routh's face, and the stern look which it always wore when he was preoccupied and thoughtful settled down upon it. For a few minutes he was silent; then he said in a low voice: "Harriet, for the first time in your life, I suppose, you very nearly mis-managed a bit of business I intrusted to you."

His wife looked at him with wonder-lifted brows. "I, Stewart? Not intentionally, I need not tell you. But how?"

"I mean this business of George's. Did not you advise him to go down and see his mother?"

"I did. I told him he must get the money from her."

"A mistake, Harry, a mistake!" said Routh, petulantly. "Getting the money means paying us; paying us means breaking with us?"

"Breaking with us?"

"Nothing less. Did you not hear him when the remorseful fit was on him just now? And don't you know that he's wonderfully young, considering all things, and has kept the bloom on his feelings in a very extraordinary manner? Did you not hear him mutter something about 'once free'? I did not like that, Harry."

"Yes, I heard him say those words," replied Harriet. "It was my hearing them that made me go up to him and speak as I did."

"That was quite right, and had its effect. One does not know what he might have done if he had turned rusty just then. And it is essential that there should not be a rupture between us now."

"George Dallas shall not dream of breaking with us; at least, he shall not carry out any such idea; I will take care of that," said Harriet, "though I think you overrate his usefulness to us."

"Do I? I flatter myself there is no man in London forced to gain his bread by his wits who has a better eye for a tool than myself. And I tell you, Harry, that during all the time we have been leading this shift life together, we have never had any one so suitable to our purposes as George Dallas."

"He is certainly wonderfully amenable."

"Amenable? He is a good deal more than that; he is devoted. You know whose doing that is, Harry, and so do I. Why, when you laid your hand on his shoulder I saw him shiver like a leaf, and the first few words from you stilled what I thought was going to be a heavy storm."

She looked up anxiously into his face, but the smile had returned to his lips, and his brow was unclouded. Not perfectly satisfied, she suffered her eyes to drop again.

"I know perfectly well," pursued Routh, "that the manner in which Dallas has stuck to us has been owing entirely to the influence you have over him, and which is natural enough. He is a bright young fellow, impressionable as we all are——" again her eyes were raised to his face, "—at his age; and though from the scrapes he has got into, and his own natural love of play (more developed in him than in any other man I ever met), though these things keep him down, he is innately a gentleman. You are the only woman of refinement and education to whose society he has access, and as, at the same time, you have a sweet face and an enormous power of will, it is not extraordinary that he should be completely under your influence."

"Don't you overrate that same influence, Stewart?" she asked with a faint smile.

"No man knows better how to appraise the value of his own goods—and you are my goods, are you not, Harry, and out and away, the best of all my goods? Not that that's saying much. No; I understand these things, and I understand you, and having perfect confidence and trust in you, I stand by and watch the game."

"And you're never jealous, Stewart?" she asked, with a half-laugh, but with the old expression of anxious interest in her eyes.

"Jealous, Harry? Not I, my love! I tell you, I have perfect trust and confidence in you, and I know your thorough devotion to our affairs. Let us get back to what we were talking about at first—what was it exactly?"

Her eyes had dropped again at the commencement of his reply,

angular, his arms and legs long and awkward, his hands and feet large and ill-shaped. He wore a large thick overcoat with broad fur collar and cuffs, and a hood (also fur-lined) hanging back on his shoulders. With the exception of a very slight strip of ribbon, he had no cravat underneath his long limp turnover collar, but stuck into his shirt-front was a large and handsome diamond pin.

"Why, what the 'tarnal," he commenced, placing his arms a-kimbo and without removing his hat—"what the 'tarnal, as they say down west, is the meaning of this little game? I come here pretty smart often, don't I? I come in gen'ly right way, don't I? Why does that gal go totin' up in front of me to-day to see if you would see me, now?"

"Some mistake, eh?"

"Not a bit of it! Gal was all right, gal was. What I want to know is, what was up? Was you a practisin' any of your little hankey-pankeys with the pasteboards? Was you a bitin' in a double set of scrip of the new company to do your own riggin' of the market? Or was it a little bit of quiet con-nubiality with the mar-darm here in which you didn't want to be disturbed?"

Stewart Routh's face had been growing darker and darker as this speech proceeded, and at the allusion to his wife his lips began to move; but they were stopped by a warning pressure underneath the table from Harriet's foot.

"You're a queer fellow, Deane!" he said, in a subdued voice. "The fact is, we have a new servant here, and she did not recognize you as *l'ami de la maison*, and so stood on the proprieties, I suppose."

"O, that's it, eh? I don't know about the proprieties; but when the gal knows more of me, she'll guess I'm one of 'em. Nothing improper about me—no loafin' rowdy ways, such as some of your friends have. Pay my way as I go, ask no favours, and don't expect none." He gave his trousers pockets a ringing slap as he spoke, and looked round with a sneering laugh.

"There, there! It's all right; now sit down, and have a glass of wine, and tell us the news."

"No," he said, "thank'ee. I've been liquoring up in the City, where I've been doin' a little business—realizing some of them

Lake Eries and Michigans as I told you on. Spanking investments they were, and have turned up trumps."

"I hope you're in the hands of an honest broker," said Routh. "I could introduce you to one who—"

"Thank'ee, I have a great man to broke for me, recommended to me from t'other side by his cousin who leads Wall-street, New York City. I have given him the writings, and am going to see him on Tuesday, at two, when I shall trouser the dollars to the tune of fifteen thousand and odd, if markets hold up, I reckon."

"And you'll bring some of that to us in Tokenhouse-yard," said Routh eagerly. "You recollect what I showed you, that I—"

"O yes!" said Deane, again with the sinister smile. "You could talk a 'coon's hind leg off, you could, Routh. But I shall just keep my dollars in my desk for a few days. Tokenhouse-yard can wait a little, can't it? just to see how things eventuate, you know."

"As you please," said Routh. "One thing is certain, Deane; you need no Mentor in your business, whatever you may do in your pleasures."

"Flatter myself, need none in neither," said the young man, with a baleful grin. "Eh, look here, now: talking of pleasures, come and dine with me on Tuesday at Barton's, at five. I've asked Dallas, and we'll have a night of it. Tuesday, the 17th, mind. Sorry to take your husband away, Mrs R., but I'll make up for it, some day. Perhaps you'll come and dine with me some day, Mrs R., without R.?"

"Not I, Mr Deane," said Harriet, with a laugh. "You're by far too dangerous a man."

Mr Deane was gone; and again Stewart Routh sat over the table, scribbling figures on his blotting-pad.

"What are you doing, Stewart?"

"Five dollars to the pound—fifteen thousand," he said, "three thousand pounds! When did he say he would draw it?"

"On Tuesday, the—the day you dine with him."

"The day I dine with him! Keep it in his desk, he said, for a few days! He has grown very shy about Tokenhouse-yard. He hasn't been there for a week. The day I dine with him!"

He had dropped his pen, and was slowly passing his hand over his chin.

"Stewart," said Harriet, going behind him and putting her arm round his neck—"Stewart, I know what thought you're busy with, but—"

"Do you, Harry?" said he, disengaging himself, but not unkindly—"do you? Then keep it to yourself, my girl, and get to bed. We must have that, Harry, in one way or another; we must have it."

She took up a candle, pressed her lips to his forehead, and went to her room without a word. But for full ten minutes she remained standing before the dressing-table buried in thought, and again she muttered to herself: "A great risk! A great risk!"

CHAPTER V.

GOING DOWN.

ON the evening of the day appointed for the dinner, Mr Philip Deane stood on the steps of Barton's restaurant in the Strand, in anything but a contented frame of mind. His face, never too frank or genial in its expression, was puckered and set in rigid lines; his right hand was perpetually diving into his waistcoat-pocket for his watch, to which he constantly referred; while with a light stick which he carried in his left, he kept striking his leg in an irritable and irritating manner.

Mr Deane had cause for annoyance; it was a quarter past seven, and neither of the guests whom he had invited had as yet appeared, though the dinner had been appointed for seven sharp. Crowds of men were pouring into and out of the restaurant, the first hungry and expectant, the last placid and replete; and Mr Deane envied the first for what they were about to receive, and the last for what they had received. Moreover, the intended

diners had in several cases pushed against him with scant ceremony, and Mr Deane was not accustomed to be pushed against; while the people who had dined eyed him, as they stood on the steps lighting their cigars, with something like compassion, and Mr Deane was unused to be pitied. So he stood there fretting and fuming, and biting his lips and flicking his legs, until his shoulder was grasped by George Dallas, who, with as much breath as he could command—not much, for he had been running—said:

“My dear Deane! a thousand apologies for being so late! Not my own fault, I protest!”

“Never is, of course,” said Mr Deane.

“Really it was not in this instance. I went round to the *Mercury* office to look at some proofs, and they kept me to do an article on a subject which I had had the handling of before, and which—”

“No one else could handle arter you, eh? Pretty tall opinion you newspaper-writin’ fellows have of yourselves! And why didn’t you bring Routh with you when you did come!”

“Routh! I haven’t seen him for three days. Isn’t he here!”

“Not he! I’ve been coolin’ myself on this a’mighty old doorstep since seven o’clock, only once goin’ inside just to look round the saloon, and I’ve not set eyes on him yet.”

“How very odd!”

“So very odd, that I’ll see him somethingest before I wait for him any longer! Come you in with me. I took a table right slick opposite the door, and we’ll go and strike up at once.”

He turned on his heel as he spoke, and walked up the passage into the large coffee-room of the restaurant. Dallas, who followed him closely, noticed him pause for an instant before one of the looking-glasses in the passage, put his hat a little more on one side, and throw open the folds of his fur-lined coat. Beneath this noticeable garment Mr Deane wore a large baggy suit of black, an open-worked shirt-front with three large diamond studs in it, a heavy gold watch-chain. There was a large diamond ring on the little finger of each hand. Thus tastefully attired, Mr Deane, swaggering easily up the centre of the coffee-room and slapping

his leg with his stick as he went, at length stopped at a vacant table, and clinked a knife against a tumbler.

"Now, waiter! Just look smart and slippy, and bring up our dinner right away. One of my friends is here, and I'm not a-goin' to wait for the other. He must take his chance, he must; but bring up ours at once, d'ye hear? Why, what on airth is *this*?"

"This" was a boy of about twelve years of age, with a dirty face and grimy hands, with an old peakless cap on its head, and a very shiny, greasy, ragged suit on its back. "This" seemed to have been running hard, and was out of breath, and was very hot and damp in the face. Following Mr Deane's glance, the waiter's eyes lighted on "this," and that functionary immediately fell into wrathful vernacular.

"Hullo! what are you doing here?" said he. "Come, you get out of this, d'ye hear?"

"I hear," said the boy, without moving a muscle. "Don't you flurry yourself in that way often, or you'll bust! And what a go that'd be! You should think of your precious family, you should!"

"Will you—"

• "No, I won't, and that's all about it. Here, guv'nor"—to Deane—"you're my pitch; I've brought this for you." As he said this, the boy produced from his pocket a bit of string, a pair of musical bones, and a crumpled note, and handed the latter to Deane, who stepped aside to the nearest gas-jet to read it. To the great indignation of the waiter, the boy sat himself down on the edge of a chair, and, kicking his legs to and fro, surveyed the assembled company with calm deliberation. He appeared to be taking stock generally of everything round him. Between his dirty finger and thumb he took up a corner of the table-cloth, then he passed his hand lightly over Dallas's overcoat, which was lying on an adjacent chair. This gave the waiter his chance of bursting out again.

"Leave that coat alone, can't you? Can't you keep your fingers off things that don't belong to you? Thought it was your own, perhaps, didn't you?" This last remark, in a highly sarcastic tone, as he lifted the coat from the chair and was about to carry it to a row of pegs by the door. "This ain't your mark, I believe? Your tailor don't live at Hamherst, does he?"

'Never mind my tailor, old cock ! P'raps you'd like my card, but I've 'appened to come out without one. But you can have my name and address—they're wery haristocratic, not such as you're used to. Jim Swain's my name—Strike-a-light Jim—60 Fullwood's-rents. Now, tell me who's your barber !' The waiter, who had a head as bald as a billiard-ball, was highly incensed at this remark (which sent some young men at an adjoining table into roars of laughter), and he would probably have found some means of venting his wrath, had not a sharp exclamation from Deane called off his attention.

"Get up dinner, waiter, at once, and clear off this third place, d'ye hear? The other gentleman ain't comin'. Now, boy, what are you waiting for?"

"No answer to go back, is there, guv'nor?"

"Answer? No; none."

"All right. Shall I take that sixpence of you now, or will you give it me to-morrow? Short reck'nings is my motter. So if you're goin' to give it, hand it over."

Unable to resist a smile, Deane took a small coin from his purse and handed it to the boy, who looked at it, put it in his pocket, nodded carelessly to Deane and Dallas, and departed, whistling loudly.

"Routh is not coming, I suppose?" said Dallas as they seated themselves at the table.

"No, he has defected, like a cussed skunk as he is, after giving me the trouble to order his dinner, which I shall have to pay for all the same. Regular riles me, that does, to be put in the hole for such a one-horse concern as Mr Routh. He ought to know better than to play such tricks with me."

"Perhaps he is compelled to absent himself. I know—"

"Compelled! That might do with some people, but it won't nohow do with me. I allow no man to put a rudeness on me. Mr Routh wants more of me than I do of him, as I'll show him before long. He wants me to come to his rooms to-morrow night—that's for his pleasure and profit, I guess, not mine—just depends on the humour I'm in. Now here's the dinner. Let's get at it at once. There's been no screwin' nor scrapin' in the order-

ing of it, and you can just give Routh a back-hander next time you see him by telling him how much you liked it."

Deane unfolded his table napkin with a flourish, and cleared a space in front of him for his plate. There was an evil expression on his face; a mordant, bitter, savage expression, which Dallas did not fail to remark. However, he took no notice of it, and the conversation during dinner was confined to ordinary commonplaces.

Mr Deane had not boasted without reason; the dinner was excellent, the wines were choice and abundant, and with another kind of companion George Dallas would have enjoyed himself. But even in the discussion of the most ordinary topics there was a low coarseness in Deane's conversation, a vulgar self-sufficiency and delight at his own shrewdness, a miserable mistrust of every one, and a general arrogance and conceit which were highly nettling and repulsive. During dinner these amiable qualities displayed themselves in Mr Deane's communication with the waiter; it was not until the cloth had been removed, and they were taking their first glass of port, that Deane reverted to what had annoyed him before they sat down.

"That Routh's what they call a mean cuss, t'other side the water," he commenced; "a mean cuss he is, and nothing else. Throwing me over in this way at the last minute, and never sending word before, so that I might have said we shall only be two instead of three, and saved paying for him! He thinks he's cruel wide awake, he does; but though he's been at it all his life, and it's not six months since I first caught sight of this little village nominated London, I don't think there's much he could put me up to now!"

He looked so expectant of a compliment, that Dallas felt bound to say: "You certainly seem to have made the most of your time!"

"Made the most of my time! I reckon I have! Why, there's no s'loon, oyster-cellar, dancing-shop, night-house of any name at all, where I'm not regular well known. 'Here's the Yankee,' they say, when I come in; not that I'm that, but I've told 'em I hail from the U-nited States, and that's why they call me the Yankee. They know me, and they know I pay my way as I go, and that I've got plenty of money. Help yourself—good port this,

ain't it?—ought to be, for they charge eight shillings a bottle for it. Why people out t'other side the water, sir, they think I'm staying in titled country-houses, and dining in Portland-place, and going to hear oratorios. I've got letters of introduction in my desk which would do all that, and more. Never mind! I like to shake a loose leg, and, as I flatter myself I can pretty well take care of myself, I shake it!"

"Yes," said Dallas, in a slightly bitter tone, with a vivid recollection of his losses at cards to Deane; "yes, you can take care of yourself."

"Rather think so," repeated Deane, with a jarring laugh. "There are two things which are guiding principles with me—number one, never to lend a dollar to any man; number two, always to have the full value of every dollar I spend. If you do that, you'll generally find yourself not a loser in the end. We'll have another bottle of this eight-shilling port. I've had the value of this dinner out of you, recollect, so that I'm not straying from my principle. Here, waiter, another bottle of this eight-shilling wine!"

"You're a lucky fellow, Deane," said George Dallas, slowly finishing his second glass of the fresh bottle; "you're a lucky fellow, to have plenty of money and to be your own master, able to choose your own company, and do as you like. I wish I had the chance!" As Dallas spoke, he filled his glass again.

"Well, there are worse berths than mine in the ship, and that's a fact!" said Deane calmly. "I've often thought about you, Dallas, I have now, and I've often wondered when you'll be like the prodigal son, and go home to your father, and succeed the old man in the business."

"I have no father!"

"Hain't you though? But you've got some friends, I reckon, who are not over-delighted at your campin' out with the wild Injuns you're living among at present?"

"I have a mother."

"That's a step towards respectability. I suppose you'll go back to the old lady some day, and be welcomed with open arms?"

"There's some one else to have a say in that matter. My mother is—is married again. I have a step-father."

BLACK SHEEP.

erally a pleasant relation, but no reason why you
slp yourself to this eight-shilling wine. *That's right;*
ttle. A step-father, eh? And he and you have
e than once, I expect?"
hat?"

l."

mean come into collision?"

I do," said Deane calmly.

idden the house. I'm looked upon as a black sheep
contamination."

old gentleman wouldn't catch anything from you.
take contamination easy, after fifty!"

not for himself that Mr Carruthers is anxious; he is
cof—he——What is the matter?"

? Nothing! What name did you say?

ers—Capel Carruthers. County family down in

ld!" said Deane, tossing off his wine, refilling his glass,
; the bottle to his companion; "and this old, gentle-
anxious about himself, you say; where is your bad in-
ly to fall, then?"

niece, who lives with them."

her name?"

Clare Carruthers! Isn't it a pretty name?"

, sir! And this niece. What's she like, now?"

allas tried to throw a knowing gleam into his eyes,
erpetual motion of the decanter had rendered somewhat
vacant, as he looked across at his companion, and said
laugh: "You seem to take a great interest in my
ne?"

whit discomposed, Philip Deane replied: "Study of
a citizen of the world, and a general desire to hear
s are like. Is Miss Clare pretty?"
ly seen her once, and that not too clearly. But she
s being lovely."

eh? And the old man won't have you at any price?
ward, that is!"

"Awkward!" said Dallas, in a thick voice, "it's more than awkward, as he shall find! I'll be even with him—I'll—Hallo! What do you want, intruding on gentlemen's conversation?"

"Beg pardon, sir," said the waiter, to whom this last remark was addressed; "no offence, gentlemen, but going to shut up now! We ain't a supper-house, gentlemen, and it's going on for twelve o'clock."

Indeed, all the other tables were vacated, so Deane rose at once and paid the bill which the waiter had laid before him. Dallas rose too with a staggering step.

"Coat, sir," said the waiter, handing it to him; "other arm, sir, please; gently does it, sir; that's it!" And with some little difficulty he pulled the coat on: George Dallas cursing it, and the country tailor who had made it, as he stood rocking uneasily on his heels and glaring vacantly before him.

"Come along, old horse," said Deane; "you'll be fixed as firm as Washington Capitol when we get into the air. Come along, and we'll go and finish the night somewhere!"

So saying, he tucked his companion's arm firmly within his own, and they sallied forth.

CHAPTER VI.

DELAY.

GEORGE DALLAS felt that his fortunes were in the ascendant, when he arose on the morning following the dinner with Deane, and found himself possessed of ten pounds, which he had been sufficiently sober to win at billiards the previous night, and consequently in a position to pay off his landlady, and turn his back upon the wretched lodging, which her temper, tyranny, and meanness had made more wretched. He lost no time in packing up the few articles he possessed—mainly consisting of books and drawing-materials—and these, together with his scanty wardrobe,

he threw into a couple of trunks, which he himself carried down the steep dark staircase and deposited in a cab. The landlady stood at the door, in the gray morning, and watched her late lodger, as he strode down the shabby little street, followed by the luggage-laden cab. She watched him, wondering. She wondered where he had got the money he had just paid her. She wondered where he had got the money to pay an extra week's rent, in default of a week's notice. When she had dunned him yesterday, as rudely and mercilessly as usual, he had said nothing indicative of an expectation of an immediate supply of money. He had only said that he hoped to pay her soon. "Where did he get the money?" the old woman thought, as she watched him. "I hope he come by it honest. I wonder where he's going to. He did not tell the cabman, leastways so as I could hear him. Ah! It ain't no business of mine; I'll just turn the rooms out a bit, and put up the bill."

So Mrs Gunther (for that was the lady's name) re-entered the shabby house, and a great activity accompanied by perpetual scolding pervaded it for some hours, during which the late tenant was journeying down to Amherst.

George Dallas strictly observed the directions contained in his mother's letter, and having started by an early train, reached Amherst at noon. Rightly supposing that at such an hour it would be useless to look for his mother in the little town, he crossed the railroad in a direction leading away from Amherst, struck into some fields, and wandered on by a rough footpath which led through a copse of beech-trees to a round bare hill. He sat down when he had reached this spot, from whence he could see the road to and from Poynings. A turnpike was at a little distance, and he saw a carriage stopped beside the gate, and a footman at the door receiving an order from a lady, whose bonnet he could just discern in the distance. He stood up and waited. The carriage approached, and he saw that the liveries were those of Mr Carruthers. Then he struck away down the side of the little declivity, and crossing the railway at another point, attained the main street of the little town. It was market-day. He avoided the inn, and took up a position whence he

could watch his mother's approach. There were so many strangers and what Mr Deane would have called "loafers" about, some buying, some selling, and many honestly and unfeignedly doing nothing, that an idler more or less was certain to pass without any comment, and it was not even necessary to keep very wide of the inn. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking into the window of the one shop in Amherst devoted to the interests of literature, which was profusely decorated with out-of-date valentines, much criticised by flies, and with feebly embossed cards, setting forth the merits of local governesses. At that time prophetic representations of the International Exhibition of '62 were beginning to appeal to the patriotic soul in light blue drawings, with flags innumerable displayed wheresoever they could be put "handy." George Dallas calmly and gravely surveyed the stock-in-trade, rather distracted by the process of watching the inn door, between which and his position intervened a group of farmers, who were to a man chewing bits of whip-cord, and examining samples of corn, which they extracted in a stealthy manner from their breeches-pocket, and displayed grudgingly on their broad palms. On the steps of the inn door were one or two busy groups, and not a man or woman of the number took any notice of Mrs Carruthers's son. They took very considerable notice of Mrs Carruthers herself, however, when her carriage stopped; and Mr Page, the landlord, actually came out, quite in the old fashioned style, to open the lady's carriage, and escort her into the house. George watched his mother's tall and elegant figure, as long as she was in sight, with mingled feelings of pleasure, affection, something like real gratitude, and very real bitterness; then he turned, strolled past the inn where the carriage was being put up, and took his way down the main street, to the principal draper's shop. He went in, asked for some gloves, and turned over the packets set before him with slowness and indecision. Presently his mother entered, and took the seat which the shopman, a mild person in spectacles, handed her. She, too, asked for gloves, and, as the shopman turned his back to the counter, rapidly passed a slip of paper to her son. She had written on it, in pencil:

"At Davis's the dentist's, opposite, in ten minutes."

"These will do, thank you. I think you said three and sixpence?" said George to the shopman, who, having placed a number of gloves before Mrs Carruthers for her selection, had now leisure to attend to his less important customer.

"Yes, sir, three and sixpence, sir. One pair, sir? You'll find them very good wear, sir."

"One pair will do, thank you," said George. He looked steadily at his mother, as he passed her on his way to the door, and once more anger arose, fierce and keen, in his heart—anger, not directed against her, but against his step-father. "Curse him!" he muttered, as he crossed the street, "what right has he to treat me like a dog, and her like a slave? Nothing that I have done justifies—no, by Heaven, and nothing that I could do, would justify—such treatment."

Mr Davis's house had the snug, cleanly, inflexible look peculiarly noticeable even amid the general snugness, cleanliness, and inflexibility of a country town, as attributes of the residences of surgeons and dentists, and gentlemen who combine both those fine arts. The clean servant who opened the door looked perfectly cheerful and content. It is rather aggravating, when one is going to be tortured, even for one's ultimate good, to be assured in a tone almost of glee :

"No, sir, master's not in, sir ; but he'll be in directly, sir. In the waiting-room, sir." George Dallas not having come to be tortured, and not wishing to see Mr Davis, bore the announcement with good humour equal to that of the servant, and sat down very contentedly on a high, hard, horsehair chair, to await events. Fortune again favoured him ; the room had no other occupant ; and in about five minutes he again heard the cheerful voice of the beaming girl at the door say,

"No, m'm, master's not in ; but he'll be in d'rectly, m'm. In the waiting-room, m'm. There's one gentleman a-waitin', m'm, but master will attend on you first, of course, m'm."

The next moment his mother was in the room, her face shining on him, her arms round him, and the kind words of the truest friend any human being can be to another, poured into his ears.

"You are looking much better, George," she said, holding

him back from her, and gazing fondly into his face. "You are looking brighter, my darling, and softer, and as if you were trying to keep your word to me."

"Pretty well, mother, and I am very thankful to you. But your letter puzzled me. What does it mean? Have you really got the money, and how did you manage to get it?"

"I have not got it, dear," she said quickly, and holding up her hand to keep him silent; "but it is only a short delay, not a disappointment. I shall have it in two or three days."

George's countenance had fallen at her first words, but the remainder of the sentence reassured him, and he listened eagerly as she continued:

"I am quite sure of getting it, George, If it does but set you free, I shall not regret the price I have paid for it."

"Tell me what it is mother," George asked eagerly. "Stay, you must not sit so close to me."

"I'm not sure that your voice ought to be heard either, speaking so familiarly, *tête-à-tête* with the important Mrs Carruthers of Poynings—a personage whose sayings and doings are things of note at Amherst," said Mrs Carruthers with a smile, as he took a seat at a little distance, and placed one of the samples of periodical literature strewn about the table, after the fashion of dentists' and surgeons' waiting-rooms, ready to her hand, in case of interruption. Then she laid her clasped hands on the table, and leaned against them, with her clear dark eyes fixed upon her son's face, and her steady voice, still sweet and pure in its tones as in her youth, as she told him what she had done.

"Do you remember, George, that on that wretched night you spoke of my diamonds, and seemed to reproach me that I should wear jewels, while you wanted so urgently but a small portion of their price?"

"I remember, mother," returned George, frowning, "and a beast I was to hint such a thing to you, who gave me all that ever was your own! I hoped you had forgiven and forgotten it. Can it be possible that you have sold—But no; you said they were family jewels."

"I will tell you. When you had gone away that night, and I

was in the ball-room, and later, when I was in my dressing-room alone, and could think of it all again, the remembrance of what you had said tormented me. The jewels you had seen me wearing were, indeed, as I had told you, not my own ; nevertheless, the remembrance of all I had ever read about converting jewels into money occupied my mind that night, and occupied it after that night for days and days. One day Mr Tatham came to Poynings, and in the evening being, as he always is, very entertaining, he related an extraordinary story of a client of his. The tale, as he told it, had many particulars, but one caught my attention. The client was a woman of large fortune, who married for love a man much younger than herself, a dissipated fellow who broke her fortune, and might have broken her heart, but for his getting killed in riding a steeple-chase. After his timely death it was discovered, among a variety of dishonourable transactions, that he had stolen his wife's diamonds, with the connivance of her maid ; had had them imitated in mock stones by a famous French dealer in false jewelry ; and had substituted the false for the real. No suspicion of the fact had ever crossed his wife's mind. The discovery was made by the jeweller's bill for the imitation being found among the papers. This led to inquiry of the dealer, who gave the required information. The moment I heard the story, I conceived the idea of getting you the money you wanted by a similiar expedient."

"Oh, mother !"

She lifted one hand with a gesture of caution, and continued, in a voice still lower than before :

"*My* jewels—at least those I have sold—were my own, George. Those I wore that night were, as I told you, family diamonds ; but Mr Carruthers gave me, when we were married, a diamond bracelet, and I understood then that it was very valuable. I shrank from such a deception. But it was for you, and I caught at it."

George Dallas sat with his hands over his face and no more interrupted her by a single word.

"By one or two questions I stimulated Mr Carruthers's curiosity in the strange story, so that he asked Mr Tatham several questions

as to where the mock jewels were made, whether they cost much, and, in fact, procured for me all the information I required. That bracelet was the only thing I had of sufficient value for the purpose, because it is expensive to get an imitation of any ornament made of very fine stones, as my bracelet is, and richly set. If the act were still to do, I should do it, George—for you—and still I should feel, as I do most bitterly feel, that in doing it I shamefully deceive my husband!"

Still George Dallas did not speak. He felt keenly the degradation to which he had reduced his mother; but so great and pervading was his bitterness of feeling towards his mother's husband, that when the wrong to *him* presented itself to his consideration, he would not entertain it. He turned away, rose, and paced the room. His mother sighed heavily as she went on.

"George, you know this is not the first time I have suffered through and for you, and that this is the first time I have ever done an act which I dare not avow. I will say no more."

He was passing behind her chair as she spoke, and he paused in his restless walk to kneel down by her, clasp her in his arms, and kiss her. As he rose from his knees, she looked at him with a face made radiant with hope, and with a mother's love.

"This is how it was done, George," she continued. "I wrote to an old friend of mine in Paris, a French lady, once my school-fellow. I told her I wanted my bracelet matched, in the best manner of imitation jewelry, as our English fashions required two, and I could not afford to purchase another made of real diamonds. I urged the strictest secrecy, and I know she will observe it; for she loves mystery only a little less than she loves dress. She undertook the commission with alacrity, and I expected to have had both the bracelets yesterday."

"What a risk you would have run, mother, supposing an occasion for your wearing the bracelet had arisen!"

"Like Anne of Austria and the studs?" said his mother with a smile. "But there was no help for it. More deceit and falsehood must have followed the first. If the occasion had arisen, Mr Carruthers would have questioned me, and I should have said

I had sent it to be cleaned, when he would have been angry that I should have done so without consulting him."

"Tyranical old brute!" was George's mental comment.

"All the meanness and all the falsehood was planned and ready, George; but it was needless. Mr Carruthers was summoned to York, and is still there. It is much for me that the parcel should arrive during his absence. I heard from my friend the day before I wrote to you, that she was about to send it immediately, and I wrote to you at once. It is to be directed to Nurse Brookes."

"How did you explain *that*, mother?" George asked quickly.

"More lies, more lies," she answered sadly, rejoicing in her heart the while to see how he writhed under the words. "I told her what was needful in the way of false explanation, and I made certain of having the bracelets to-day. So I must have done but for a second letter from my friend Madame de Haulleville, to the effect that, having a sudden opportunity of sending the packet to England by a private hand, she had availed herself of it, at the loss of (at most, she writes) a day or two."

"Confound her French parsimony!" said George; "think of the unnecessary risk she makes us run, when I come down here for nothing."

"It is not so much parsimony as precaution, George. And she could know nothing of any risk."

"What is to be done, then?" he asked, in a softer tone.

"Can you not remain at Amherst?" asked his mother. "Have you anything to do which will prevent your remaining here for a day or two? If not you will be as well here as in London, for there is no danger of Mr Carruthers seeing you."

"Suppose he did?" George burst out. "Is he the lord and master of all England, including Amherst? Perhaps the sunshine belongs to him, and the fresh air? If I keep away from Poyning's, that's enough for him, surely."

Mrs Carruthers had risen, and looked appealingly at him.

"Remember, George, your misconduct would justify Mr Carruthers in the eyes of the world, for the course he has taken towards you; or," here she moved near to him, and laid her hand on his

arm, "if you refuse to consider *that*, remember that Mr Carruthers is my husband, and that I love him."

"I will, mother, I will," said George impetuously. "Graceless, ungrateful wretch that I am! I will never say another word against him. I will remain quietly here as you suggest. Shall I stay at the inn? Not under my own name; under my not very well known but some day of course widely to be famous pen-name—Paul Ward. Don't forget it, mother, write it down; stay, I'll write it for you. P-a-u-l W-a-r-d." He wrote the name slowly on a slip of paper, which Mrs Carruthers placed between the leaves of her pocket-book.

"You must go now," she said to him; "it is impossible you can wait here longer. We have been singularly fortunate as it is. When I write, I will tell you whether I can come to you here—in the town, I mean—or whether you shall come to me. I think you will have to come to me. Now go, my darling boy." She embraced him fondly.

"And you, mother?"

"I will remain here a little longer. I have really something to say to Mr Davis."

He went. Black care went with him, and shame and remorse were busy at his heart. Would remorse deepen into repentance, and would repentance bear wholesome fruit of reformation? That was for the future to unravel. The present had acute stinging pain in it, which he longed to stifle, to crush out, to get away from, anyhow. He loved his mother, and her beautiful earnest face went with him along the dusty road; the unshed tears in her clear dark eyes seemed to drop in burning rain upon his heart; the pleading tones of her sorrowful voice filled all the air. How wicked and wretched, how vain, silly, and insipid, how worthless and vulgar, all his pleasures and pursuits seemed now! A new spirit arose in the wayworn, jaded man; a fresh ambition sprang up in his heart. "It's a wretched, low, mean way of getting free, but I have left myself no choice. I *must* take advantage of what she has done for me, and then I never will wrong her love and generosity again. I will do right, and not wrong; this is my resolution, and I will work it out, *so help me God!*"

He had unconsciously come to a stop at the noble old oak gates, flung hospitably open, of a wide-spreading park, through one of whose vistas a grand old mansion in the most elaborate manner of the Elizabethan style was visible. He looked up, and the beauty of the prospect struck him as if it had been created by an enchanter's wand. He looked back along the road by which he had come, and found that he had completely lost sight of Amherst.

He went a pace or two beyond the gate pillars. A hale old man was employed in nailing up a trailing branch of jessamime against the porch of the lodge.

"Good afternoon, old gentleman. This is a fine place, I fancy."

"Good afternoon, sir. It is a fine place. You'll not see many finer in Amherst. Would you like to walk through it, sir? You're quite welcome."

"Thank you. I should like to walk through it. I have never been down this way before. What is the name of this place, and to whom does it belong?"

"It is called the Sycamores, sir, and it belongs to Sir Thomas Boldero."

CHAPTER VII.

AMONG THE BEECHES.

A FINE avenue of beech-trees led from the gate through which George Dallas had passed, to the house which had attracted his admiration. These grandest and most beautiful of trees were not, however, the distinguishing feature of the place: not its chief pride. "The Sycamores" was so called in honour of a profusion of trees of that kind, said in the neighbourhood to have no rivals in all England. Be that as it might, the woodland scenery in Sir Thomas Boldero's noble park was beautiful in the highest degree,

and of such beauty George Dallas was keenly and artistically appreciative. The tender loveliness of the spring was abroad throughout the land ; its voices, its gladness, its perfumes, were around him everywhere, and as the young man strolled on under the shadow of the great branches, bearing their tender burden of bright, soft, green, half-unclosed buds, the weight and blackness of care seemed to be lifted off him, and his heart opened to fresh, pure, simple aspirations, long strangers to his jaded but not wholly vitiated character. He was very young, and the blessed influence of youth told upon him, its power of receiving impressions, its faculty of enjoyment, its susceptibility to external things—a blessing or a curse as it is used—its buoyancy, its hopefulness. As George Dallas turned from the broad smooth carriage-way, and went wandering over the green elastic turf of the carefully kept park, winding in and out through the boles of the grand old trees, treading now on a tender twig, again on a wild flower, now starting from her nest a brooding lark, anon stopping to listen to a burst of melody from some songster free from domestic cares, he was hardly recognizable as the man who had sat listening to Philip Deane's hard worldly talk at the Strand tavern the day before.

"Brighter and softer" his mother had said he was looking, and it was true. Brighter and softer still the hard, pleasure-wearied, joyless face became, as the minutes stole over him, among the sycamores and beeches. He had pursued his desultory path a mile or more, and had lost sight of the house and the avenue, when he came to a beautiful open glade, carpeted with turf of the softest green, and over-arched by forest trees. Looking down its long vista, he saw that it terminated with a brilliant flower-garden, and a portion of a noble stone terrace, lying beneath one side of the many-turreted house. He stood entranced by the beauty of the scene, and, after a few moments, felt in his pocket for pencil and paper, in order to sketch it. He found both, and looking round him, saw a piece of the trunk of a felled tree, not yet removed by the care of the forester.

"A capital place to sketch from," thought George, as he folded his coat, and laid it upon the convenient block, and immediately became absorbed in his occupation. He was proceeding rapidly

BLACK SHEEP.

sketch, and feeling rather disposed to get it finished as
as he could, in order that he might return to the inn and
some food, of which he stood in considerable need, when
ht the sound of galloping upon the turf in the distance
him. He raised his head and listened; there it was, the
id thud of hoofs on the grass. Was there one rider, or
ere more? He listened again—only one, he thought; and
rapid noise ceased, and was succeeded by the slow, patter-
ad of a horse ridden daintily and gently about and about,
by a capricious fancy. Still George listened, and presently
me riding out of the shadowy distance into the full expanse
glade, down which the declining sun sent golden rays, as if
tation, a lady, who was, as his first glance showed him,
nd beautiful. She was quite unconscious of his presence,
piece of timber on which he had been sitting was out of
of sight, and though he had risen, he was still standing
t. She came towards him, her slight form swaying to the
ents of her bright bay thorough-bred, as she put the animal
all sorts of fanciful paces, now checking him with the
ow encouraging him with her clear sweet young voice, and
his arched neck with her white-gloved hand. The young
oked out from his hiding-place, enraptured, as she came on,
a of youth, beauty, and refinement, down the wide green
he sun shining on her, the birds singing, the flowers bloom-
her, the proud walls of the old house rising grandly in the
ound, as if in boast of the worthy shelter that awaited her.
and nearer she came, and now George Dallas could see her
tinctly, and could hear the pretty words with which she
her horse. It was a face to remember; a face to be the
for having seen; a face whose beauty was blended of form
our, of soul, feature, and expression; a face which had all
e earth has to give of its best and fairest, touched with the
hich is higher and better, which earth has not to bestow.
the face of a girl of nineteen, whose clear eyes were of
brown, whose cheeks bloomed with the purest, most vary-
ver-like colour, whose rich golden hair shone in the sun-
s its braids rippled and turned about with the movement

of her head, tossed childishly to the rhythmical measure of her horse's tread.

Half a dozen trees only intervened between her and the spot where George Dallas stood, greedily watching her every movement and glance, when she took her hat off, and pushed the heavy golden hair off her broad white forehead. At that moment her horse jerked the rein she held loosely, and pulled her slightly forward, the hat falling from her hand on the grass.

"Now see what you have done," she said, with a gay laugh, as the animal stood still and looked foolish. "I declare I'll make you pick it up with your mouth. There, sir, turn, I tell you; come, you know how." And she put the horse through all the pretty tricks of stooping and half kneeling, in which she evidently felt much more pleasure than he did. But she did not succeed: he obeyed touch and word readily; but he did not pick up the hat. At last she desisted, and said with a funny look of mock patience:

"Very well, Sir Lancelot, if you won't you won't, so I must get off." She had just gathered her skirt in her hand, and was about to spring from her saddle, when George Dallas stepped out from among the trees, picked up the hat, and handed it to her, with a bow.

The young lady looked at him in astonishment, but she thanked him with self-possession, which he was far from sharing, and put her hat on, while Sir Lancelot pawed impatiently.

"Thank you," she said; "I did not see any one near."

"I was sitting yonder," said George, pointing to the spot whence he had emerged, "on some fallen timber, and was just taking the liberty of sketching the view of the house, when you rode up."

She coloured, looked pleased and interested, and said, hesitatingly, having bidden Sir Lancelot "stand:" "You are an artist, sir?"

"No," he answered, "at least, only in a very small way; but this is such a beautiful place, I was tempted to make a little sketch. But I fear I am intruding; perhaps strangers are not admitted."

"Oh yes, they are," she replied hurriedly. "We have not many strangers in this neighbourhood; but they are all welcome to come

into the park, if they like. Had you finished your sketch?" she asked timidly, with a look towards the sheet of paper, which had fallen when Dallas rose, and had been fluttered into sight by the gentle wind. George saw the look, and caught eagerly at any pretext for prolonging the interview a few moments.

"May I venture to show you my poor attempt?" he asked, and without awaiting her answer, he stepped quickly back to the place he had left. The girl walked her horse gently forward, and as he stooped for the paper, she was beside him, and, lifting his head, he caught for a moment the full placid gaze of her limpid eyes. He reddened under the look, full of gentleness and interest as it was, and a pang shot through his heart, with the swift thought, that once he might have met such a woman as this on equal terms, and might have striven with the highest and the proudest for her favour. That was all over now; but at least he, even he, might sun himself in the brief light of her presence. She laid the rein on Sir Lancelot's neck, and took the little drawing from his hand with a timid expression of thanks.

"I am no judge," she said, when she had looked at it, and he had looked at her, his whole soul in his eyes; "but I think it is very nicely done. Would you not like to finish it? Or perhaps there are some other points of view you would like to take? I am sure my uncle, Sir Thomas Boldero, would be delighted to give you every facility. He is very fond of art, and—and takes a great interest in artists."

"You are very kind," said Dallas. "I shall be at Amherst a day or two longer, and I will take the liberty of making a few sketches—that splendid group of sycamores, for instance."

"Ah, yes," she said, laughing, "I call them the godfathers and godmothers of the park. They would make a pretty picture. I tried to draw them once, myself, but *you* cannot imagine what a mess I made of it."

"Indeed," said Dallas, with a smile, "and why am I to be supposed unable to imagine a failure?"

"Because you are an artist," she said, with charming archness and simplicity, "and, of course, do everything well."

This simple exhibition of faith in artists amused Dallas, to whom

this girl was a sort of revelation of the possibilities of beauty, innocence, and *naïveté*.

"Of course," he replied gravely; "nevertheless I fear I shall not do justice to the sycamores."

And now came an inevitable pause, and he expected she would dismiss him and ride away, but she did not. It was not that she had any of the awkward want of manner which makes it difficult to terminate a chance interview, for she was perfectly graceful and self-possessed, and her manner was as far removed from clumsiness as from boldness. The girl was thinking, during the pause whose termination Dallas dreaded. After a little, she said:

"There is a very fine picture-gallery at the Sycamores, and I am sure it would give my uncle great pleasure to show it to you. Whenever any gentlemen from London are staying at Amherst, or passing through, Mr Page at the inn tells them about the picture-gallery, and they come to see it, if they care about such things; perhaps it was he who told you?"

"No," said Dallas, "I am not indebted for the pleasure—for the happiness—of this day to Mr Page. No one guided me here, but I happened to pass the gate, and a very civil old gentleman, who was doing some gardening at the lodge, asked me in."

His looks said more than his words dared to express, of the feelings with which his chance visit had inspired him. But the girl did not see his looks; she was idly playing with Sir Lancelot's mane, and thinking.

"Well," she said at last, settling herself in the saddle in a way unmistakably preliminary to departure, "if you would like to see the picture-gallery, and will walk round that way, through those trees, to the front of the house"—she pointed out the direction with the handle of her riding-whip—"I will go on before, and tell my uncle he is about to have a visitor to inspect his treasures."

"You are very kind," said Dallas earnestly, "and you offer me a very great pleasure. But Sir Thomas Boldero may be engaged—may think it an intrusion."

"And a thousand other English reasons for not accepting at once a civility frankly offered," said the girl, with a delightful laugh. "I assure you, I could not gratify my uncle more than by picking

up a stray connoisseur ; or my aunt than by bringing to her a gentleman of sufficient taste to admire her trees and flowers."

"And her niece, *Miss Carruthers*," thought George Dallas.

"So pray go round to the house. Don't forget your coat. I see it upon the ground—there. It has got rubbed against the damp bark, and there's a great patch of green upon it."

"That's of no consequence," said George gaily ; "it's only an Amherst coat, and no beauty."

"You must not make little of Amherst," said the girl, with mock gravity, as George stood rubbing the green stain off his coat with his handkerchief ; "we regard the town here as a kind of metropolis, and have profound faith in the shops and all to be purchased therein. Did dear old Evans make that coat?"

"A venerable person of that name sold it me," returned George, who had now thrown the coat over his arm, and stood, hat in hand, beside her horse.

"The dear ! I should not mind letting him make me a habit," she said. "Good-bye, for the present—that way," again she pointed with her whip, and then cantered easily off, leaving George in a state of mind which he would have found it very difficult to define, so conflicting were his thoughts and emotions. He looked after her, until the last flutter of her skirt was lost in the distance, and then he struck into the path which she had indicated, and pursued it, musing.

"And that is Clare Carruthers ! I thought I had seen that head before, that graceful neck, that crown of golden hair. Yes, it is she ; and little she thinks whom she is about to bring into her uncle's house—the outcast and exile from Poynings ! I will see it out ; why should I not ? I owe nothing to Carruthers that I should avoid this fair, sweet girl, because he chooses to banish me from her presence. What a presence it is ! What am I that I should come into it ?" He paused a moment, and a bitter tide of remembrance and self-reproach rushed over him, almost overwhelming him. Then he went on more quickly, and with a flushed cheek and heated brow, for anger was again rising within him. "You are very clever as well as very obstinate, my worthy stepfather, but you are not omnipotent yet. Your darling niece, the

beauty, the heiress, the great lady, the treasure of price to be kept from the sight of me, from the very knowledge of anything so vile and lost, has met me, in the light of day, not by any device of mine, and has spoken to me, not in strained, forced courtesy, but of her own free will. What would you think of that, I wonder, if you knew it! And my mother? If the girl should ask my name, and should tell my mother of her chance meeting with a wandering artist, one Paul Ward, what will my mother think?—my dear conscientious mother, who has done for me what wounds her conscience so severely, and who will feel as if it were wounded afresh by this accidental meeting, with which she has nothing in the world to do.” He lifted his hat, and fanned his face with it. His eyes were gleaming, his colour had risen; he looked strong, daring, active, and handsome—a man whom an innocent girl, all unlearned in life and in the world’s ways, might well exalt in her guileless fancy into a hero, and be pardoned her mistake by older, sadder, and wiser heads.

“How beautiful she is, how frank, how graceful, how unspeakably innocent and refined! She spoke to me with such an utter absence of conventional pretence, without a notion that she might possibly be wrong in speaking to a stranger, who had offered her a civility in her uncle’s park. She told that man on the balcony that night that Sir Thomas Boldero was her uncle. I did not remember it when the old man mentioned the name. How long has she been here, I wonder? Is she as much here as at Poynings? How surprised she would be if she knew that I know who she is; that I have heard her voice before to-day; that in the pocket-book she held in her hand a few minutes ago there lies a withered flower, which she once touched and wore. Good God! What would a girl like that think of me, if she knew what I am—if she knew that I stole like a thief to the window of my mother’s house, and looked in, shivering, a poverty-stricken wretch, come there to ask for alms, while she herself glittered among my mother’s company, like the star of beauty and youth she is? How could she but despise me if she knew it! But she will never know it, or me, most likely. I shall try to get away and *work out all this*, far away in a country where no memories of sin and shame and sorrow

will rise up around me like ghosts. I am glad to have seen and spoken to Clare Carruthers ; it must do me good to remember that such a woman really exists, and is no poet's or romancer's dream. I am glad to think of her as my mother's friend, companion, daughter almost. My mother, who never had a daughter, and has, God help her, no son *but me!* But I shall never see her again, most likely. When I reach the house, I shall find a pompous servant, no doubt, charged with Sir Thomas's compliments, and orders to show me round a gallery of spurious Dutch pictures, copies of Raphael and Carlo Dolce, and a lot of languishing Lelys and gluttony-suggesting Knellers."

With these disparaging words in his thoughts, George Dallas reached the border of the park, and found himself in front of the house. The façade was even more imposing and beautiful than he had been led to expect by the distant view of it, and the wide arched doorway gave admittance to an extensive quadrangle beyond. A stone terrace stretched away at either side of the entrance, as at Poynings. Standing on the lower step, a tame peacock displaying his gaudy plumage by her side, he saw Miss Carruthers. She came forward to meet him with a heightened colour and an embarrassed manner, and said :

"I am very sorry, indeed, but Sir Thomas and my aunt are not at home. They had no intention of leaving home when I went out for my ride, but they have been gone for some time." She looked towards a servant who stood near, and added : "I am so sorry ; nothing would have given my uncle more pleasure ; but if you will allow me, I will send—"

George interrupted her, but with perfect politeness.

"Thank you very much, but, if you will allow me, I will take my leave, and hope to profit by Sir Thomas Boldero's kindness on a future occasion." He bowed deeply, and was turning away, when, seeing that she looked really distressed, he hesitated.

"I will show you the pictures myself, if you will come with me," she said, in a tone so frank, so kindly and engaging, that the sternest critic of manners in existence, supposing that critic to have been any other than an old maid, could not have condemned the spontaneous courtesy as forwardness. "I am an indifferent

substitute for my uncle, as a cicerone, but I think I know the names of all the artists, and where all the pictures came from. Stephen,"—she spoke now to the servant,—“I am going to take this gentleman through the picture-gallery ; go on before us if you please.”

So George Dallas and Clare Carruthers entered the house together, and lingered over the old carvings in the hall, over their inspection of the sporting pictures which adorned it, and the dining-room, over the family portraits in the vestibule, the old china vases, and the rococo furniture. Every subject had an interest for them, and they did not think of asking themselves in what that interest originated and consisted. The girl did not know the young man's name, but his voice was full of the charm of sweet music for her, and in his face her fancy read strange and beautiful things. He was an artist, she knew already, which in sober language meant that she had seen a very tolerable sketch which he had made. He was a poet, she felt quite convinced ; for did he not quote Tennyson, and Keats, and Coleridge, and even Herrick and Herbert, as they wandered among the really fine and valuable paintings which formed Sir Thomas Boldero's collection, so aptly and with such deep feeling and appreciation as could spring only from a poetic soul ?

It was the old story, which has never been truly told, which shall never cease in the telling. Both were young, and one was beautiful ; and though the present is an age which mocks at love at first sight, and indeed regards love at all, under any circumstances, with only decent toleration, not by any means amounting to favour, it actually witnesses it sometimes. The young man and the girl—the idle, dissolute, perverted young man ; the beautiful, pure, innocent, proud, pious young girl—talked together that spring afternoon, as the hours wore on to evening, of art, of literature, of music, of travel, of the countless things over which their fancy rambled, and which had wondrous charms for her bright intellect and her secluded life, simple and ignorant in the midst of its luxury and refinement. All that was best and noblest in George's mind came out at the gentle bidding of the voice that sounded for him with a new, undreamed-of music ; and

the hard, cold, wicked world in which he lived, in which hitherto, with rare intervals of better impulses, he had taken delight, fell away from him, and was forgotten. The girl's grace and beauty, refinement and gentleness, were not more conspicuous than her bright intelligence and taste, cultivated, not indeed by travel or society, but by extensive and varied reading. Such was the influence which minute after minute was gaining upon George. And for her? Her fancy was busily at work too. She loved art; it filled her with wonder and reverence. Here was an artist, a young and handsome artist, of unexceptionable manners. She adored poetry, regarding it as a divine gift; and here was a poet—yes, a poet; for she had made Dallas confess that he very often wrote "verses;" but that was his modesty: she knew he wrote poetry—beautiful poetry. Would he ever let her see any of it?

"Yes, certainly," he had answered; "when I am famous, and there is a brisk competition for me among the publishers, I will send a copy of my poems to you."

"To me! But you do not know my name."

"O yes, I do. You are Miss Carruthers."

"I am; but who told you?"

The question disconcerted Dallas a little. He turned it off by saying, "Why, how can you suppose I could be at Amherst without learning that the niece of Sir Thomas Boldero, of the Sycamores, is Miss Carruthers?"

"Ah, true; I did not think of that," said Clare simply. "But I do not live here generally; I live with another uncle, my father's brother—Sir Thomas is my mother's—Mr Capel Carruthers, at Poynings, seven miles from here. Have you heard of Poynings?"

Yes, Mr Dallas had heard of Poynings; but now he must take his leave. It had long been too dark to look at the pictures, and the young people were standing in the great hall, near the open door, whence they could see the gate and the archway, and a cluster of servants idling about and looking out for the return of the carriage. Clare was suddenly awakened to a remembrance of the lateness of the hour, and at once received her visitor's farewell, gracefully reiterating her assurances that her uncle would gladly make him free of the park for sketching purposes. She would tell

Sir Thomas of the pleasant occurrences of the day ;—by the by, she had not the pleasure of knowing by what name she should mention him to her uncle.

“A very insignificant one, Miss Carruthers. My name is Paul Ward.”

And so he left her, and, going slowly down the great avenue among the beeches, met a carriage containing a comely, good-humoured lady and an old gentleman, also comely and good-humoured ; who both bowed and smiled graciously as he lifted his hat to them.

“Sir Thomas and my lady, of course,” thought George ; “a much nicer class of relatives than Capel Carruthers, I should say.”

He walked briskly towards the town. While he was in Clare’s company he had forgotten how hungry he was, but now the remembrance returned with full vigour, and he remembered very clearly how many hours had elapsed since he had eaten. When he came in sight of the railway station, a train was in the act of coming in from London. As he struck into a little by-path leading to the inn, the passengers got out of the carriages, passed through the station gate, and began to straggle up in the same direction. He and they met where the by-path joined the road, and he reached the inn in the company of three of the passengers, who were about to remain at Amherst. Mr Page was in the hall, and asked George if he would dine.

“Dine ?” said George. “Certainly. Give me anything you like, so that you don’t keep me waiting ; that’s the chief thing.”

“It is late, sir, indeed,” remarked Mr Page ; “half-past seven, sir.”

“So late ?” said George carelessly, as he turned into the coffee-room.

CHAPTER VIII.

GLAMOUR.

WHEN George Dallas had dined, he left the coffee-room, and retired to the bed-room which he had ordered, and which looked refreshingly clean and comfortable, when mentally contrasted with the dingy quarters on which he had turned his back in the morning. It was yet early in the evening, but he was tired ; tired by the excitement and the various emotions of the day, and also by the long hours passed in the fresh balmy country air, which had a strange soporific effect on a man whose lungs and limbs were of the town, towny. The evening air was still a little sharp, and George assented readily to the waiter's proposition, made when he perceived that no more orders for drink were to be elicited from the silent and preoccupied young man, that "a bit of fire" should be kindled in his room. Over that "bit of fire" he sat long, his arms folded on his breast, his head bent, his brow lowering, his eyes fixed on the glowing embers. Was he looking at faces in the fire—his parents' faces, the faces of friends whom he had treated as enemies, of enemies whom he had taken for friends? Were reproachful eyes looking at him from out the past ; were threatening glances in the present flashed on him? He sat there, black and moody, a long while, but at length his fixed gaze relaxed, the muscles of his mouth softened, broke into a slow smile, and a light came into his dull gloomy eyes. Then he rose, took his pocket-book from his breast-pocket, made some memoranda at the back of the sketch taken that day in Sir Thomas Boldero's park, put back the book, and, once more settling himself near the fire, lighted his pipe and began to smoke.

The musing look remained upon his face, but it was no longer painful, and, as he smoked, he fell to building castles in the air, as baseless, maybe, as the vapour which curled in fantastic wreaths about his face, but tenanted by hope, and inspired by higher and better resolves than had animated George Dallas for many a day. The twin angels, love and gratitude, were near him ; invisibly

their soft white wings were fluttering about him, refreshing the jaded heart and the stained brow. His mother, and the girl whom he had that day seen for the second time, and recognized with feelings full of a bitter and evil impulse at first, but who had soon exercised over him a nameless fascination full of a pure and thrilling delight, such as no pleasure of all his sin-stained life had ever previously brought him—of these two he was thinking. If George Dallas could have seen his mother at the moment, when he, having laid his exhausted pipe upon the little wooden chimney-piece, and hastily undressed, lay down in his bed, with his hands clasped over the top of his head, in his favourite attitude when he had anything particular to think of, he would have found her not only thinking but talking of him. Mr Carruthers was absent, so was Clare; she had the grand stately house all to herself, and she improved the occasion by having tea in her dressing-room, having dismissed her maid, affianced to a thriving miller in the village, to a *tête-à-tête* with her lover, and summoning her trusty friend Mrs Brookes to a confidential conference with her. The two women had no greater pleasure or pain in their lives than talking of George. There had been many seasons before and since her second marriage when Mrs Carruthers had been obliged to abstain from mentioning him, so keen and terrible was her suffering on his account, and at such seasons Ellen Brookes had suffered keenly too, though she had only vaguely known wherefore, and had always waited until the thickest and darkest of the cloud had passed, and her mistress had once more summoned courage to broach the subject never absent from the mind of either.

There was no reticence on this occasion; the mother had taken a dangerous step, and one whose necessity she indeed deeply deplored, but she had gotten over the first great effort and the apprehension connected with it, and now she thought only of her son, she dwelt only upon the hope, the confidence, the instinctive belief within her, that this was really the turning-point, that her prayers had been heard, that the rock of a hard and stubborn heart had been struck and had yielded, that her son would turn from the old evil paths, would consider his ways and be wise for

the future. So she sat and talked to the humble friend who knew her and loved her better than any one else in the world knew or loved her; and when she at length dismissed her and lay down to rest, there was more peace at her heart than had dwelt there for a long time past.

So one of the women of whom the prodigal son had thought gently and gratefully that night, was thinking of him with love that no unworthiness could kill or lessen, with hope which no experience could exhaust. And the other? Well, the other was playing and singing to her uncle and aunt in the green drawing-room at the Sycamores, and if she had said little to Sir Thomas and Lady Boldero concerning the young artist who was so delighted with the picture-gallery, and who had despaired of doing justice to the grand old trees in the park, it is presumable that, like the parrot of old renown, she thought the more.

George Dallas slept well that night in the little country inn, and awoke to a pleasant consciousness of rest, leisure, and expectation. As he dressed himself slowly, listening to the queer mixture of town and country sounds which arose inside and outside the house, he took up a similar train of thought to that in which sleep had interrupted him on the previous night, and began to form resolutions and to dream dreams. After he had breakfasted, and perused all the daily intelligence which found its way to Amherst, where the population were not remarkably eager for general information, and the *Illustrated London News* was represented by one copy, taken in by the clergyman's wife, and circulated among her special friends and favourites, he went out, and once more took the direction of the Sycamores.

Should he go into the park, he asked himself, or would that be too intrusive a proceeding? Sir Thomas, on his fair niece's showing, was evidently an elderly gentleman of kindly impulses, and who could say but that he might send a message to Mr Page the landlord, inviting him to inform the stranger within his gates that he might have another look at the picture-gallery at the Sycamores? Was this a very wild idea? He did not know. It seemed to him as likely as not that a jolly kindly man, disposed to let his fellow-creatures enjoy a taste of the very abundant good things

which providence had lavished on himself, might do a thing of the kind. A pompous, purse-proud, egotistical old fellow, who would regard every man unpossessed of landed property as a wretched creature, beneath his notice in all respects, except that of being made to admire and envy him as deeply as possible, might also think of sending such an invitation, but George Dallas felt quite sure Sir Thomas Boldero was not a man of that description. Suppose such a message should come? He had not given any name at the inn; he wished now he had done so; he would only take a short walk, and return to correct the inadvertence. At so early an hour there would be no likelihood of his seeing Miss Caruthers. It was in the afternoon she had ridden out yesterday, perhaps she would do the same to-day. At all events, he would return to the Sycamores on the chance, at the same hour as that at which he had seen her yesterday, and try his luck.

The road on which he was walking was one of the beautiful roads common in the scenery of England, a road which dipped and undulated, and wound about and about, making the most of the natural features of the landscape without any real sacrifice of the public convenience, a road shadowed frequently by tall stately trees, and along one side of which the low park paling, with a broad belt of plantation beyond, which formed the boundary of the Sycamores, stretched for three miles. On the other side, a well-kept raised pathway ran alongside a hedge, never wanting in the successive beauties of wild flowers and "tangle," and which furnished shelter to numerous birds. The day was bright and cheerful, and a light breeze was stirring the budding branches and lending a sense of exhilaration to the young man who so rarely looked on the fair face of nature, and who had unhappily had all his purer tastes and sympathies so early deadened. They revived under the influence of the scene and the softening effect of the adventure which had befallen him the day before. He stopped opposite the oaken gates, which had lain open yesterday, but were closed to-day, and he rambled on, further away from the town, and crossing the road, took his way along the park paling, where the fragrant odour from the shrubberies added a fresh pleasure to his walk.

He had passed a bend of the road which swept away from the large gates of the park, and was peering in at the mossy tufts, studded with violets and bluebells clustering round the stems of the young trees in the plantation, when his eyes lighted on a small gate, a kind of wicket in the paling, imperfectly secured by a very loose latch, and from which a straight narrow path, bordered with trimly-kept rows of ground ivy, led into a broader road dividing the plantation from the park.

"A side entrance, of course," said Dallas to himself, and then, looking across the road, he saw that just opposite the little gate there was a wooden stile, by which a path through the fields, leading, no doubt, into the town of Amherst, could be attained from the raised footpath.

"I suppose the land on both sides belongs to Sir Thomas," thought Dallas, and as he made a momentary pause, a large black Newfoundland dog, carrying a basket in his mouth, came down the narrow path, bumped himself against the loosely fastened gate, swung it open, and stopped in the aperture, with a droll air of having done something particularly clever. Dallas looked admiringly at the beautiful creature, who was young, awkward, and supremely happy, and the next instant he heard a voice speaking from the top of the straight walk.

"Here, Cæsar," it said; "come here, sir; who told you I was going that way?"

Cæsar tossed up his head, somewhat to the detriment of the basket, and lolloped about with his big black legs, but did not retrace his steps, and the next moment Miss Carruthers appeared. A few yards only divided her from George, who stood outside the gate, his face turned full towards her as she came down the path, and who promptly took off his hat. She returned his salutation with embarrassment, but with undisguisable pleasure, and blushed most becomingly.

"I suppose I ought to walk on and leave her; but I won't," said George to himself, in the momentary silence which followed their mutual salutation, and then, in a kind of desperation, he said:

"I am fortunate to meet you again, by a lucky accident, Miss

Carruthers. You are out earlier to-day, and this is Cæsar's turn."

He patted the shiny black head of the Newfoundland, who still obstructed the entrance to the path, as he spoke, and Cæsar received the attention tolerably graciously.

"Yes, I generally walk early, and ride in the afternoon."

"Escorted by your dumb friends only," said George, in a tone not quite of interrogation.

Miss Carruthers blushed again as she replied :

"Yes, my horse and my dog are my companions generally. My aunt never walks, and Sir Thomas never rides. Were you going into the park again, Mr Ward?"

By this time Cæsar had run out into the road, and was in a state of impatient perplexity, and evidently much inconvenienced by the basket, which he was too well trained to drop, but shook disconsolately as he glanced reproachfully at Clare, wondering how much longer she meant to keep him waiting.

"No, Miss Carruthers, I was merely walking past the Sycamores, and recalling yesterday's pleasure—half gladly, half sadly, as I fancy we recall all pleasures."

"I—I told my uncle of your visit yesterday, and he said he was sorry to have missed you, and hoped you would see as much of the park as you liked. Did—did you finish your sketch, Mr Ward? Oh, that horrid Cæsar, he will have the handle off my basket. Just see how he is knocking it against the stile."

She came hurriedly through the open gateway into the road, George following her.

"May I take it from him?" he said.

"Oh, pray do; there now, he is over the stile, and running through the field."

George rushed away in pursuit of Cæsar, triumphant at his success in thus terminating a period of inaction for which he saw no reasonable excuse. Miss Carruthers mounted the stile in a more leisurely fashion, turned into the footpath which led through the field, and in a few moments met George returning, her basket in his hand, and Cæsar slouching along beside him, sulky and discontented.

She thanked George, told him she was going nearly as far as

Amherst by the "short cut," which lay through her uncle's land, and the two young people in another minute found themselves walking side by side, as if such an arrangement were quite a matter of course, to which Mrs Grundy could not possibly make any objection. Of course it was highly imprudent, not to say improper, and one of the two was perfectly conscious alike of the imprudence and the impropriety; perfectly conscious, also, that both were increased by the fact that he was George Dallas, and the young lady was Clare Carruthers, the niece of his step-father, the girl, on whose account mainly he had been shut out from the house called by courtesy his mother's. As for Clare Carruthers, she knew little or nothing of life and the world of observances and rules of behaviour. Sheltered from the touch, from the breath, from the very knowledge of ill, the girl had always been free with a frank innocent freedom, happy with a guileless happiness, and as unsophisticated as any girl could well be in this wide-awake realistic nineteenth century. She was highly imaginative, emphatically of the romantic temperament, and, in short, a Lydia Languish without the caricature. Her notions of literary men, artists, and the like, were derived from their works; and as the little glimpse which she had as yet had of society (she had only "come out" at the ball at Poynings in February) had not enabled her to correct her ideas by comparison with reality, she cherished her illusions with ardour proportioned to their fallaciousness. The young men of her acquaintance were of either of two species: sons of country gentlemen, with means and inclination to devote themselves to the kind of life their fathers led, or military magnificoes, of whom Clare, contrary to the fashion of young ladies in general, entertained a mean and contemptuous opinion. When Captain Marsh and Captain Clitheroe were home "on leave," they found it convenient and agreeable to pass a good deal of their leisure at Poynings; and as they happened to be ninnies of the first magnitude, whose insignificance in every sense worth mention was only equalled by their conceit, Miss Carruthers had conceived a prejudice against military men in general, founded upon her dislike of the two specimens with whom she was most familiar. Clergymen are not uncommonly heroes in the imagination of young girls, but the most determined curate-worshipper could

not have invested the clergymen who cured the souls in and about Amherst with heroic qualities. They were three in number. One was fat, bald, and devoted to antiquarianism and port wine. Another was thin, pock-marked, ill-tempered, deaf, and a flute-player. The third was a magistrate, a fox-hunter, and a despiser of womankind. In conclusion, all three were married, and Miss Carruthers was so unsophisticated, that, if they had been all three as handsome and irresistible as Adonis, she would never have thought of them in the way of mundane admiration, such being the case. So Clare's imagination had no home pasture in which to feed, and roamed far afield.

It had taken its hue from her tastes, which were strongly pronounced, in the direction of literature. Clare had received a "good education;" that is to say, she had been placed by a fashionable mother under the care of a fashionable governess, who had superintended fashionable masters while they imparted a knowledge of music, drawing, dancing, and a couple of modern languages to her pretty, docile, intelligent pupil. The more solid branches of instruction Clare had climbed under Miss Pettigrew's personal care, and had "done credit" to her instructress, as the phrase goes. But the upshot of it all was, that she had very little sound knowledge, and that the real educational process had commenced for her with the termination of Miss Pettigrew's reign, and had received considerable impetus when Clare had been transferred—on the not particularly lamented decease of the fashionable mother, who was Sir Thomas Boldero's sister, and remarkably unlike that hearty and unworldly country gentleman—to Poynings and the guardianship of Mr Carruthers. Then the girl began to read after her own fancy indeed, unguided and uncontrolled, but in an omnivorous fashion; and as she was full of feeling, fancy, and enthusiasm, her reading ran a good deal in the poetical, romantic, and imaginative line. Novels she devoured, and she was of course a devotee of Tennyson and Longfellow, saying of the latter, as her highest idea of praise, that she could hardly believe him to be an American, or a dweller in that odious vulgar country, and wondering why Mrs Carruthers seemed a little annoyed by the observation. She read history, too, provided it

was picturesquely written, and books of travel, exploration, and adventure she delighted in. Periodical literature she was specially addicted to, and it was rather a pleasant little vanity of Clare to "keep up with" all the serial stories—not confusing the characters or the incidents, no matter how numerous they were, and to know the tables of contents of all the magazines and reviews thoroughly. She had so much access to books that, as far as a lady's possible requirements could go, it might be said, without exaggeration, to be unlimited. Not only did the Sycamores boast a fine library, kept up with the utmost care and attention by Sir Thomas Boldero, and of which she had the freedom, but Poynings was also very creditably endowed in a similar respect, and Mrs Carruthers, as persistent a reader as Clare, if less discursive, subscribed largely to Mudie's. Croquet had not yet assumed its sovereign sway over English young-persondom, and none but ponderous and formal hospitalities prevailed at Poynings, so that Clare had ample leisure to bestow upon her books, her pets, and her flowers. She was so surrounded with luxury and comfort, that it was not wonderful she should invest opposite conditions of existence with irresistible charms; and her habitual associates were so commonplace, so prosperous and conventional, that her aspirations for opportunities of hero-worship naturally directed themselves towards oppressed worth, unappreciated genius, and fiery hearts struggling manfully with adverse fate. "The red planet Mars" was a great favourite with her, and to suffer and be strong a much finer idea to her mind than not to suffer and to have no particular occasion for strength. She knew little of the realities of life, having never had a deeper grief than that caused by the death of her mother, and she was in the habit of reproaching herself very bitterly with the superficiality and the insufficiency of the sorrow she had experienced on that occasion, and therefore mild and merciful judges would have pitied and excused her errors of judgment, her impulsive departure from conventional rules. Mild and merciful judges are not plentiful commodities, however, and Mrs Grundy would doubtless have had a great deal to say, and a very fair pretext for saying it, had she seen Miss Carruthers strolling through the fields which lay between the

Sycamores and Amherst, in deep and undisguisedly delighted conversation with a strange young man, who was apparently absorbed in the pleasure of talking to and listening to her, while Cæsar trotted now by the side of the one, anon of the other, with serene and friendly complacency. Mrs Grundy was, however, not destined to know anything about the "very suspicious" circumstance for the present. And George Dallas and Clare Carruthers, with the unscrupulous yielding to the impulse of the moment, which affords youth such splendid opportunities for getting into scrapes, from which the utmost efforts of their elders are powerless to extricate them, walked and talked and improved the shining hours into a familiar acquaintance, which the girl would have called friendship, but which the young man felt, only too surely, was love at first sight. He had mocked at such an idea, had denied its existence, had derided it with tongue and pen, but here it was, facing him now, delivering to him a silent challenge to deny, dispute, or mock at it any more.

A faint suspicion that the beautiful girl whom he had seen yesterday for the second time meant something in his life, which no woman had ever meant before, had hung about him since he had left the Sycamores after their first interview; but now, as he walked beside her, he felt that he had entered the enchanted land, that he had passed away from old things, and the chain of his old life had fallen from him. For weal or woe, present with her or absent from her, he knew he loved this girl, the one girl whom it was absolutely forbidden to him to love.

They had talked commonplaces at first, though each was conscious that the flurried earnestness of the other's manner was an absurd commentary upon the ordinary style of their conversation. George had asked, and Clare had implied, no permission for him to accompany her on her walk; he had quietly taken it for granted, and she had as quietly acquiesced, and it so happened that they did not meet a single person to stare at the tall, gaunt-looking but handsome stranger walking with Miss Carruthers, to wonder who he "mought a bin," and proceed to impart his curiosity to the servants at the Sycamores, or the gossip at the alehouse.

"This path is not much used," said George.

"No, very little indeed," replied Clare. "You see it does not lead directly anywhere but to the Sycamores, and so the farming people, my uncle's servants, and tradespeople, back and forward to the park, chiefly use it. I often come this way and do not meet a soul."

"Are you going into the town?"

"Not all the way: just to the turnpike on the Poynings road. Do you know Mr Carruthers's place, Mr Ward?"

George felt rather uncomfortable as he answered in the negative, though it was such a small matter, and the false statement did not harm anybody. He had told a tolerable number of lies in the course of his life, but he shrank with keen and unaccustomed pain from making this girl, whose golden brown eyes looked at him so frankly, whose sweet face beamed on him so innocently, a false answer.

"I am going to the cottage on the roadside, just below the turnpike," Clare continued; "an old servant of my aunt lives there, and I have a message for her. I often go to see her, not so much from kindness, I'm afraid, as because I hate to walk outside the park without an object."

"And you don't mind riding without an escort any more than you do walking without one," said George, not in the tone of a question, but in that of a simple remark. Clare looked at him with some surprise; he met the look with a meaning smile.

"You dislike the attendance of a groom, Miss Carruthers, and never admit it except in case of necessity. You are surprised, I see: you will be still more surprised when I tell you I learned this, not from seeing you ride alone in the park—there is nothing unusual in that, especially when you are on such good terms with your horse—but from your own lips."

"From my own lips, what can you possibly mean, Mr Ward? I never saw you until yesterday, and I know I never mentioned the subject then."

The young man drew imperceptibly nearer to her, on the narrow path where they were walking, and as he spoke the following sentences, he took from his breast-pocket a little note-case, which

he held in his left hand, at which she glanced curiously once or twice.

"You saw me for the first time yesterday, Miss Carruthers, but I had seen you before. I had seen you the centre of a brilliant society, the pride and belle of a ball-room where I had no place." ("Now," thought George, "if she only goes home and tells my mother all this, it will be a nice business. Never mind, I can't help it;" and he went on impetuously.) The girl made no remark, but she looked at him with growing astonishment. "You talked to a gentleman happier than I—for he was with you—of your daily rides, and I heard all you said. Forgive me, the first tone of your voice told me it was but a light and trivial conversation, or I would not have listened to it." (George is not certain that he is telling the truth here, but she is convinced of it; for is he not an author, an artist, a hero?) "I even heard the gentleman's name with whom you were talking, and just before you passed out of my hearing you unconsciously gave me *this*."

He opened the note-book, took out a folded slip of paper, opened that too, and held towards Clare, but without giving it into her hand, a slip of myrtle.

"I gave you that, Mr Ward!" she exclaimed. "I—when—where—how? What do you mean? I remember no such conversation as you describe; I don't remember anything about a ball or a piece of myrtle. When and where was it? I have been out so little in London."

Now George had said nothing about London, but opportunely remembering that he could not explain the circumstances he had rather rashly mentioned, and that, unexplained, they might lead her to the conclusion that the part he had played on the mysterious occasion in question had been that of a burglar, he adroitly availed himself of her error. True, on the other hand, she might very possibly think that the only part which a spectator at a ball in London, who was not a partaker in its festivities, could have played must have been that of a waiter, which was not a pleasant suggestion; but somehow he felt no apprehension on that score. The girl went on eagerly questioning him, but he only smiled, very

sweetly and slowly, as he carefully replaced the withered twig in the note-book, and the note-book in his pocket.

"I cannot answer your questions, Miss Carruthers; *this is my secret*—a cherished one, I assure you. The time may come, though the probability is very dim and distant just now, when I shall tell you when, and where, and how I saw you first; and if ever that time should come," he stopped, cleared his voice, and went on, "things will be so different with me that I shall have nothing to be ashamed or afraid of."

"*Ashamed* of, Mr Ward?" said Clare, in a sweet soft tone of deprecating wonder. All her curiosity had been banished by the trouble and sadness of his manner, and profound interest and sympathy had taken its place.

"You think I ought not to use that word; I thank you for the gentle judgment," said George, his manner indescribably softened and deepened; "but if ever I am in a position to tell you—but why do I talk such nonsense? I am only a waif, a stray, thrown for a moment in your path, to be swept from it the next and forgotten."

This was dangerous ground, and they both felt it. A chance meeting, a brief association which perhaps never ought to have been; and here was this girl, well brought up, in the strictest sense of the term, yielding to the dangerous charm of the stranger's society, and feeling her heart die within her as his words showed the prospect before her. Her complexion died too, for Clare's was a tell-tale face, on which emotion had irresistible power. George saw the sudden paleness, and she knew he saw it.

"I—I hope not," she said, rather incoherently. "I—I think not. You are an artist and an author, you know." (How ashamed George felt, how abashed in the presence of this self-deluding innocence of hers!) "And I, as well as all the world, shall hear of you."

"*You*, as well as all the world," he repeated, in a dreamy tone. "Well, perhaps so. I will try to think so, and to hope it will be—"

He stopped; the gentleman's nature in him still existing, still ready at call, notwithstanding his degradation, withheld him from

presuming on the position in which he found himself, and in which the girl's innocent impulsiveness had placed her. To him, with his knowledge of who she was, and who he was, with the curious relation of severance which existed between them, the sort of intimacy which had sprung up had not so much strangeness as it externally exhibited, and he had to remind himself that she did not share that knowledge, and therefore stood on a different level to his, in the matter. He determined to get off the dangerous ground, and there was a convincing proof in that determination that the tide had turned for the young man, that he had indeed resolved upon the better way. His revenge upon his step-father lay ready to his hand; the unconscious girl made it plain to him that he had excited a strange and strong interest in her. It was not a bad initiation of the prodigal's project of reform that he renounced that revenge, and turned away from the temptation to improve his chance advantage into the establishment of an avowed mutual interest. This step he took by saying, gaily, "Then I have your permission to send you my first work, Miss Carruthers, and you promise it a place in that grand old library I had a glimpse of yesterday?"

A little shade of something like disappointment crossed Clare's sunny face. The sudden transition in his tone jarred with her feelings of curiosity, romance, and flattered vanity. For Clare had her meed of that quality, like other women and men, and had never had it so pleasantly gratified as on the present occasion. But she had too much good breeding to be pertinacious on any subject, and too much delicacy of perception to fail in taking the hint which the alternation in George's manner conveyed. So there was no further allusion to the sprig of myrtle or to the future probability of a disclosure; but the two walked on together, and talked of books, pictures, and the toils and triumphs of a literary life (George, to do him justice, not affecting a larger share in them than was really his), until they neared Clare's destination. The footpath which they had followed had led them by a gentle rise in the ground to the brow of a little hill, similar to that from which George had seen his mother's carriage approach Amherst on the preceding day, but from the opposite end of the town. Imme-

diately under the brow of this hill, and approached by the path, which inclined towards its trim green gate, stood a neat small cottage, in a square bit of garden, turning its red-brick vine-covered side to the road beneath. When George saw this dwelling, he knew his brief spell of enjoyment was over.

"That is the cottage," said Clare, and he had the consolation of observing that there was no particular elation in her voice or in her face. "Sir Thomas built it for its present tenant."

"Shall you be going back to the Sycamores alone, Miss Carruthers?" asked George, in the most utterly irrelevant manner. He had a wild notion of asking leave to wait for her, and escort her home. Again Clare blushed as she replied hurriedly:

"No, I shall not. My aunt is to pick me up here in the carriage, on her way to the town, and I return to Poynings this evening. I have been away a fortnight."

George longed to question her concerning life at Poynings, longed to mention his mother's name, or to say something to the girl that would lead her to mention it; but the risk was too great, and he refrained.

"Indeed! and when do you return to the Sycamores?" was all he said.

"It is quite uncertain," she replied. "I fancy my uncle means to go to London for part of the season, but we don't quite know yet; he never says much about his plans." She stopped abruptly, as if conscious that she was not conveying a very pleasing impression of her uncle. George understood her, and correctly, to refer to Mr Carruthers.

They had descended the incline by this time, and were close to the cottage gate. It lay open, and Cæsar ran up to the prim little green door.

"Come here, sir," called Clare; "please let him have the basket again, Mr Ward. Old Willcox reared him for me, from a puppy, and he likes to see him at his tricks. Thank you. Now then, go on, Cæsar."

Her hand was on the open gate, her face turned away from the cottage, towards George—it was no easier to her to say good-bye than to him, he thought; but it must be said, so he began to say it.

"Then, Miss Carruthers, here I must leave you; and soon I must leave Amherst."

Perhaps he hoped she would repeat the invitation of yesterday. She did not; she only said:

"Thank you very much for your escort, Mr. Ward. Good-bye."

It was the coldest, most constrained of adieux. He felt it so, and yet he was not altogether dissatisfied; he would have been more so, had she retained the natural grace of her manner and the sweet gaiety of her tone. He would have given much to touch her hand at parting, but she did not offer it; but with a bow passed up the little walk to the cottage door, and in a moment the door had closed upon her, and she was lost to his sight.

He lingered upon the high road from which he could see the cottage, and gazed at the window, in the hope of catching another glimpse of Clare; but suddenly remembering that she might perhaps see him from the interior of the room, and be offended by his doing so, he walked briskly away in a frame of mind hard to describe, and with feelings of a conflicting character. Above the tumult of new-born love, of pride, rage, mortification, anger, hope, the trust of youth in itself, and dawning resolutions of good, there was this thought, clear and prominent:

"If I am ever to see her again, it shall be in my own character, and by no tricky subterfuge. If she ever comes to care for me, she shall not be ashamed of me."

George Dallas returned to the inn, where his taciturnity and preoccupation did not escape notice by the waiters and Mr Page, who accounted for it by commenting on his request for writing-materials, to the use of which he addressed himself in his own room, as a "hoddity of them literary gents; if they ain't blabby and blazin' drunk, they're most times uncommon sullen. This un's a poetical chap, I take it."

That evening George heard from his mother. She desired him to come to Poynings at twelve o'clock on the following Monday (this was Thursday), and to wait in the shrubbery on the left of the house until she should join him. The note was brief, but affectionate, and of course made George understand that she had received the jewels.

Late in the afternoon of the day which had witnessed her second interview with the young man whom she knew as Paul Ward, and with whom her girlish fancy was delightfully busy, Clare Carruthers arrived at Poynings. She received an affectionate greeting from Mrs Carruthers, inquired for her uncle, learned that no communication had been received from him that day, and therefore his wife concluded that his original arrangement to return on the following Tuesday morning remained unaltered; and then went off to see that Sir Lancelot, who had been brought home from the Sycamores by a groom, was well cared for. Somehow, the beautiful animal had a deeper interest than ever for his young mistress. She touched his silken mane with a lighter, more lingering touch; she talked to him with a softer voice.

"He did not forget to mention you," she whispered to the intelligent creature, as she held his small muzzle in one hand and stroked his face with the other. "I wonder, I wonder, shall we ever see him again."

When the two ladies were together in the drawing-room that evening, and the lamps were lighted, cheerful fires burning brightly in the two grates, which were none too many for the proportions of the noble room, the scene presented was one which would have suggested a confidential, cozy chat to the uninitiated male observer. But there was no chat and no confidence there that evening. Ordinarily, Mrs Carruthers and Clare "got on" together very nicely, and were as thorough friends as the difference in their respective ages and the trouble in the elder lady's life, hidden from the younger, would permit. But each was a woman of naturally independent mind, and their companionship did not constrain either. Therefore the one sat down at a writing-table, and the other at the piano, without either feeling that the other expected to be talked to. Had not Mrs Carruthers's preoccupation, her absorption in the hopes and fears which were all inspired by her son, so engrossed her attention, that she could not have observed anything not specially impressed upon her notice, she would have seen that Clare was more silent than usual, that her manner was absent, and that she had a little air of making music an excuse for thought. The leaves of her music-book were not turned, and

her fingers strayed over the keys, in old melodies played almost unconsciously, or paused for many minutes of unbroken silence. She had not mentioned the incidents of the last two days to Mrs Carruthers, not that she intended to leave them finally unspoken of, but that some undefined feeling prompted her to think them over first ;—so she explained her reticence to herself.

While Clare played, Mrs Carruthers wrote, and the girl, glancing towards her sometimes, saw that her face wore an expression of painful and intense thought. She wrote rapidly, and evidently at great length, covering sheet after sheet of foreign letter paper with bold firm characters, and once Clare remarked that she took a memorandum-book out of her pocket and consulted it. As she replaced the book, a slip of paper fluttered from between the leaves and fell to the ground, unobserved either by herself or Clare. Shortly afterwards Mrs Carruthers rose, collected her papers into a loose heap upon the table, and left the room, still with the same preoccupied expression on her face. Clare went on playing for a few moments, then, finding Mrs Carruthers did not return, she yielded to the sense of freedom inspired by finding herself alone, and leaving the piano, went over to one of the fireplaces and stood by the low mantelpiece, lost in thought. Several minutes passed away as she stood thus, then she roused herself, and was about to return to the piano, when her attention was attracted to a small slip of paper which lay on the floor near the writing-table. She picked it up, and saw written upon it two words only, but words which caused her an indescribable thrill of surprise. They were

PAUL WARD.

"Mrs Carruthers dropped this paper," said Clare to herself, "and *he* wrote the name. I know his hand, I saw it in the book he took the sketch in. Who is he? How does she know him? I wish she would return. I must ask her." But then, in the midst of her eagerness, Clare remembered a certain air of mystery about her chance acquaintance ; she recalled the tone in which he had said, "That is my secret," the hints he had let fall that there existed something which time must clear up. She remembered,

too, that he had not betrayed any acquaintance with Mrs Carruthers, had not even *looked* like it when she had mentioned Poynings and her uncle (and Clare had a curiously distinct recollection of Mr Paul Ward's looks) ; finally she thought how—surely she might be said *to know*, so strangely and reasonably did she suspect—that there were trials and experiences in Mrs Carruthers's life to which she held no clue, and perhaps this strange circumstance might be connected with them.

“It is *his* secret and *hers*, if she knows him,” the girl thought, “and I shall best be true and loyal to them both by asking nothing, by seeking to know nothing, until I am told.” And here a sudden thrill of joy, joy so pure and vivid that it should have made her understand her own feelings without further investigation, shot through the girl's heart, as she thought :

“If she knows him, my chance of seeing him again is much greater. In time I must come to understand it all.”

So Clare allowed the paper to fall from her hands upon the carpet whence she had taken it, and when Mrs Carruthers re-entered the room, bringing a packet of letters which she had gone to seek, Clare had resumed her place at the piano.

CHAPTER IX.

TIDED OVER.

It was the fifth morning after George Dallas's arrival in Amherst, the day on which his mother had appointed by letter for him to go over to Poynings, and there receive that which was to set him free from the incubus of debt and difficulty which had so long oppressed him. An anticipation of pleasure crossed his mind so soon as he first opened his eyes ; he soon remembered whence the satisfaction sprung, and on going to the window and looking out, he found that nature and he were once again in accord. As

at the time of his misery she had worn her blackest garb, her direst expression, so now, when hope seemed to gleam upon him, did nature don her flowery robes and array herself in her brightest verdant sheen. Spring was rapidly ripening into summer; into the clean and comely little town, which itself was radiant with whitened door-steps, and newly painted wood-work, and polished brass fittings, came wafted delicious odours from outlying gardens and uplands, where the tossing grass went waving to and fro like the undulations of a restless sea, and in the midst of which the sturdy old farm-houses, dotted here and there, stood out like red-faced islands. Dust, which even the frequent April showers could not lay, was blowing in Amherst streets; blinds, which had been carefully laid by during the winter (the Amherst mind had scarcely arrived at spring blinds for outside use, and contented itself with modest striped sacking, fastened between hooks on the shop fronts, and poles socketed into the pavement), were brought forth and hung up in all the glory of cleanliness. It was reported by those who had been early astir, that Tom Leigh, the mail-cart driver, had been seen with his white hat on that morning, and any Amherstian who may have previously doubted whether the fine weather had actually arrived, must have been flinty-hearted and obdurate indeed not to have accepted that assurance.

The sunshine and the general brightness of the day had its due effect on George Dallas, who was young, for a nineteenth-century man almost romantic, and certainly impressible. His spirits rose within him, as, his breakfast finished, he started off to walk to Poyninga. Drinking in the loveliness of the broad sun-steeped landscape, the sweet odours coming towards him on the soft breeze, the pleasant sound, were it chink of blacksmith's hammer, or hum of bees, or voice of cuckoo hidden deep in distant bright-leaved woods, the young man for a time forgot his baser associations and seemed to rise, in the surroundings of the moment, to a better and purer frame of mind than he had known for many years. Natural, under such circumstances, was the first turning of his thoughts to his mother, to whose deep love and self-sacrifice he was indebted for the freedom which at length was about to be his. In his worst times there had been one bright spot of love for her in all

the black folly of his life, and now the recollection of her disinterestedness and long suffering on his behalf made her as purely dear to him as when, in the old days that seemed so long ago, he had said his prayers at her knee. He recollected walking with her in their garden on mornings like these, when they were all in all to each other, soon after his father's death, when that chastening memory was on them both, and before there was any thought of Mr Carruthers or his niece—or his niece!—and straightway off went his thoughts into a different channel. What a pretty girl! so soft and quiet, so fresh withal, and frank, and guileless, so different from—Well, he didn't know; with similar advantages Harriet might have been very much the same. But Miss Carruthers was certainly specially charming; the talk which they had had together showed that. The talk which they had together? Was he not entering her own domain? What if she were to meet and recognize him there? That would spoil all their plans. A word from her would—O no! Though Mrs Carruthers might not have been intended as a conspirator by nature, George felt by his recent experience of his mother's movements that she would have sufficient foresight to prevent Clare from leaving the house, just at that time, lest she might discover the rendezvous in the shrubbery. The tact that had so rapidly shifted the venue of their last meeting from the bustle of the draper's to the calm solitude of the dentist's would assuredly be sufficient to prevent a young girl from intruding on their next appointment.

Busy with these thoughts, and ever and anon pausing to look round him at the fair scenes through which he was passing, George Dallas pursued his way along the high road until he gained the summit of the little hill whence is obtained the first view of Poynings and its grounds. There he stopped suddenly; from that point he had always intended to reconnoitre, but he had never anticipated seeing what he did see—a carriage driving through the open lodge gates, and in the carriage reclining at his ease no less a person than Mr Capel Carruthers. It was he, not a doubt about it, in the respectability of his glossy broad-brimmed hat, in his white whiskers, in his close-fitting dogskin gloves, in the very double gold eye-glass with which he was looking at

nature in a very patronizing manner. Even if he had not been short-sighted, Mr Carruthers was at such a distance as would utterly have prevented him from recognizing any one on the top of the hill; but George Dallas no sooner saw him than instinctively he crouched down by the hedge-side and waited until the carriage was rolling down the avenue; then he slowly raised himself, muttering:

"What the deuce has brought him back just now? confound him! What on earth will she do? It's most infernally provoking, just at this very nick of time; he might have kept off a few hours longer. She won't come to the shrubbery now; she's frightened out of her life at that old ruffian, and, by George, I shall be put off again! After all I've said to Routh, after all the castles in the air which I've been building on the chance of getting free, I shall have to slink back to town empty-handed!" He was leaning over a gate in the hedge, and as he spoke he shook his fist at the unconscious county magistrate, visible in the distance now but by the crown of his hat. "Except," continued George, "knowing how deeply I'm involved, she'll risk all hazards and come to the shrubbery. Perhaps she's started now, not expecting him, and when he reaches the house and doesn't find her there—he's always hanging on her trail, curse him!—he will make inquiries and follow her. That would be worst of all, for not only should I miss what she promised me, but she would come to grief herself, poor darling. Well, I must chance it, whatever happens."

He turned down a by-lane which ran at right angles to the avenue, pursuing which he came upon a low park paling enclosing the shrubbery. Carefully looking round him, and finding no one within sight, he climbed the paling, and dropped noiselessly upon the primrose-decked bank on the other side. All quiet; nothing moving but the birds darting in and out among the bright green trees, and the grasshoppers in myriads round his feet. The walk had tired him, and he lay down on the mossy turf and awaited his mother's coming. Mossy turf, soft and sweet-smelling, the loud carol of the birds, the pleasant, soothing, slumberous sound of the trees bending gently towards each other as the mild air rustled in

the leaves. It was long since he had experienced these influences, but he was now under their spell. What did they recall? Boyhood's days; the Bishop's Wood, where they went birds'-nesting; Duke Primus, who wore "stick-ups," and was the cock of the school, and Charley Cope, who used to tell such good stories in bed, and Bergemann, a German boy, who was drowned in a pond in just such a part of the wood as this, and—twelve o'clock rings sharply out from the turret clock in Poynings stables, and at its sound away fly the ghosts of the past. Twelve o'clock, the time appointed in his mother's letter for him to meet her in that very spot. He rose up from the turf, and sheltering himself behind the broad trunk of an old tree, looked anxiously in the direction of the house. No human being was to be seen; a few rabbits whisked noiselessly about, their little white tails gleaming as they disappeared in the brushwood, but they and the birds and the grasshoppers comprised all the life about the place. He looked on the big trees and the chequered shade between them, and the glimpses of blue skylight between their topmost boughs; he left his vantage ground and strode listlessly to and fro; the quarter chime rung out from the turret, then the half hour, and still no one came.

Some one coming at last! George's quick eyes make out a female figure in the far distance, not his mother, though. This woman's back is bowed, her step slow and hesitating, unlike Mrs Carruthers, on whose matronly beauty Time has as yet laid his gentlest touch. He must stand aside, he thought, amongst the trees until the new comer had passed by; but as the woman approached, her gait and figure seemed familiar to him, and when she raised her head and looked round her as though expecting some one, he recognized Nurse Brooks. The old woman gave a suppressed scream as George Dallas stepped out from among the trees and stood before her.

"I could not help it, George," said she; "I could not help it, though I was looking for and expecting you at that moment, and that's more than you were doing for me, isn't it? You were expecting some one else, my boy?"

"Is anything the matter? Is she ill? Has her husband found out?"

"Nothing! She's—well, as well as may be, poor dear, and—"

"Then she hasn't been able to do what she promised?"

"Oh, George, George, did you ever know her fail in doing what she promised, from the days when you were a baby until now? Better for her, poor thing, as I've often told her, if she hadn't—"

"Yes, yes, nurse, I know all about that, of course; but why isn't she here now?"

"She daren't come, George. Master's come home unexpected, and he and Miss Clare are with her, and there is no chance for her to make an excuse to get away. So she just runs into her dressing-room for a minute, and sends to me—she always sends to me in her troubles, as you've seen many a time and oft, Master George—and tells me, she says, 'Take this and go into the shrubbery, and tell George,' she says, 'why I couldn't come, and that I sent it him with my heart's love, and God bless him,' she says."

As the old woman spoke, she produced from her pocket a round flat parcel wrapped in writing-paper, which she handed to Dallas. He took it with a very weak attempt at unconcern (he did not know with how much of their secret his mother might have intrusted the old nurse), and thrust it into his breast-pocket, saying at the same time, "Thanks, nurse. That's all right. Did she say anything else?"

"Nothing, I think. O yes—that of course you would not remain in the neighbourhood, and that you were to be sure to write to her, and send your address."

"She need not be afraid—I'm off at once! Good-bye, nurse. Tell my mother I'll hold to all I promised her. Thank her a thousand times, bless her! Good-bye, dear old woman; perhaps the next time we meet I shan't have to skulk in a wood when I want to see my mother!"

He pressed a hasty kiss on the old woman's upturned face, and hurried away. The last sound he had uttered seemed to have re-kindled the old vindictive feeling in his mind, for as he strode away he muttered to himself: "Skulking in a wood, hiding behind

trees—a pretty way for a son to seek his mother, and she never to come after all! Prevented by her fear of that pompous idiot, her husband. To think of her, such as I recollect her, being afraid of an empty-headed dotard. And yet he is kind to her. She said so herself—that's nothing; but Nurse Brookes said so too—that's something—that's everything. If he were not—if he treated her badly—he should rue it. But he is fond of her, and proud of her, as well he may be; and Clare, that charming girl, is his niece. Charming indeed! Ah, Capel Carruthers, you have a wholesome horror of me, but you little know that two guardian angels plead for you!”

The sight of the park paling over which he had climbed into the shrubbery, and over which lay his only way out of it, seemed to change the tenor of his thoughts. He stopped at once, and looking cautiously round, stepped in among the trees, and drew from his breast the packet which Nurse Brookes had given to him. He tore off the outer covering of writing-paper, and carefully placed it in his pocket, then he came to a purple morocco case, which he opened, and there before him, set off by the velvet on which it lay, was the bracelet, a band of dead gold, set with splendid wreaths of forget-me-nots in diamonds and turquoises. George Dallas took it up and examined it attentively, weighed it in his hand, looked closely at the stones in various lights, then replaced it in its case, as a smile of satisfaction spread over his face.

“No mistake about that!” said he. “Even I, all unaccustomed to such luxuries, know that this must be the right thing. She has sent it as she received it, in the very box, with the swell Bond-street jeweller's name and all! Not a bad notion of a present, Mr Carruthers, by any means. You've money, sir; but, it must be owned, you've taste also. It's only to be hoped that you've not very sharp eyesight, or that you'll never be tempted to make a very close inspection of the Palais Royal bijouterie which is doing duty for this in the jewel-box! These will set me clear with Routh, and leave me with a few pounds in my pocket besides, to begin life anew with. If it does that and I can stick to my employment on the *Mercury*, and get a little more work somewhere else, and give up that infernal card-playing—that's the

worst of it—I may yet make our friend C. C. believe I am not such a miserable scoundrel as he now imagines me!”

He replaced the case carefully in his breast-pocket, climbed the palings, and was once more on the high road, striding in the direction of Amherst. Ah, the castle-building, only occasionally interrupted by a return to the realities of life in squeezing the packet in his breast-pocket, which he indulged in during that walk! Free, with the chance and the power of making a name for himself in the world! free from all the debasing associations, free from Routh, from Harriet—from Harriet? Was that idea quite so congenial to his feelings? to, be separated from Harriet, the only woman whom, in his idle dissipated days, he had ever regarded with anything like affection, the only woman who—and then the bright laughing face and the golden hair of Clare Carruthers rose before his mind. How lovely she was, how graceful and bred-looking, above all, how fresh and youthful, how unsullied by any contact with the world, with all the native instincts pure and original, with no taught captivations or society charms, nothing but—

“Yoho! Yoho!”

George Dallas started from his reverie at the repeated cry, and only just in time sprang from the middle of the road along which, immersed in thought, he had been plodding, as the mail-cart, with its red-faced driver, a sprig of lilac in his breast and a bunch of laburnum behind each ear of his horse, came charging full upon him. The driver was a man choleric by nature, and with a great sense of his position as an important government officer, and he glared round at George and asked him a few rapid questions, in which the devil and his supposed residence were referred to with great volubility. Under less pleasant circumstances Dallas would probably have returned his greeting with interest; as it was, he merely laughed, and, waving his hand, proceeded on his way to the inn, whence, having paid his bill, he returned to London by the first train.

During the whole of the journey up to town the young man's thoughts were filled with his intentions for the future, and no sooner had the train stopped at London-bridge than he determined

to go at once to the *Mercury* office and announce his readiness to undertake any amount of work. Accordingly he struck away across the Borough, and, crossing Blackfriars-bridge, dived among a mass of streets running at right angles with Fleet-street, until he arrived at a large, solemn, squat old building, over the door of which glimmered a lamp with the words "Mercury Office" in half-effaced characters. A small pull at a sharp, round, big bell brought a preternaturally sharp boy to the door, who at once recognized the visitor, and admitted him within the sacred precincts. Up a dark passage, up a steep and regular flight of stairs, George Dallas proceeded, until on the first floor he rapped at the door facing him, and, being bidden to come in, entered the editorial sanctum.

A large cheerless room, its floor covered with a ragged old Turkey carpet, on its walls two or three book-shelves crammed with books of reference, two or three maps, an old clock gravely ticking, and a begrimed bust, with its hair dust-powdered, and with layers of dust on its highly developed cheek-bones. In the middle of the room a battered old desk covered with blue books, letters opened and unopened, piles of manuscript under paper-weights, baskets with cards of invitations for all sorts of soirées, entertainments, and performances, and snake-like india-rubber tubes for communication with distant printing-offices or reporters' rooms, a big leaden inkstand like a bath, and a sheaf of pens more or less dislocated. At this desk sat a tall man of about fifty, bald-headed, large-bearded, with sharp gray eyes, well-cut features, and good presence. This was Mr Leigh, editor of the *Mercury*; a man who had been affiliated to the press from the time of his leaving college, who had been connected with nearly all the morning journals in one capacity or another, correspondent here, manager there, descriptive writer, leader-writer, critic, and scrub, and who, always rising, had been recommended by the Jupiter Tonans of the press, the editor of the *Statesman*, to fill the vacant editorial chair at the *Mercury*. A long-headed, far-seeing man, Grafton Leigh, bright as a diamond, and about as hard, keen as a sword in the hands of a fine fencer, and as difficult to turn aside, earnest, energetic, devoted to his work, and caring for nothing else in comparison—not even for his wife, then sound asleep in his little house in Brompton.

ton, or his boy working for his exhibition from Westminster. He looked up as George entered, and his features, tightly set, relaxed as he recognized the young man.

"You, Ward!" said he. "We didn't look for you till to-morrow night. What rush of industry, what sudden desire to distinguish yourself, has brought you here to-night, my boy?"

Before George could answer, a young man came forward from an inner room, and caught him by the hand.

"What, Paul, old fellow, this is delicious! He must be brimming over with ideas, Chief, and has come down here to ventilate them."

"Not I," said George. "My dear Chief," addressing Leigh, "both you and Cunningham give me credit for more virtue than I possess. I merely looked in as I passed from the railway to see how things were going on."

"This is a sell," said Mr Cunningham. "I thought I had booked you. You see that confounded Shimmer has failed us again. He was to have done us a sensation leader on the murder—"

"The murder! What murder?"

"Oh, ah, I forgot; happened since you went away. Wapping or Rotherhithe—some waterside place—body found, and all that kind of thing! Shimmer was to have done us one of his stirrers, full of adjectives, denouncing the supineness of the police, and that kind of thing, and he's never turned up, and the Chief has kept me here to fill his place. Confounded nuisance! I'm obliged to fall back on my old subject—Regulation of the City Traffic!"

"I'm very sorry for you, Cunningham," said George, laughing; "but I can't help you to-night. I'm seedy and tired, and I know nothing about the murder, and want to get to bed. However, I came to tell the Chief that I'm his now and for ever, ready to do double tasks of work from to-morrow out."

"All right, Ward. So long as you don't overdo it, I shall always be delighted to have you with us," said Mr Leigh. "Now get home to bed, for you look dog-tired." And George Dallas shook hands with each, and went away.

"Glad to hear we're going to have a good deal of work out of Ward, Chief," said Cunningham, when he and his editor were alone

again. "He's deuced smart when he likes—as smart as Shimmer, and a great deal more polished and gentlemanly."

"Yes," said Grafton Leigh, "he's a decided catch for the paper. I don't think his health will last, though. Did you notice his manner to-night?—nervous, agitated, and twitching, like a man who had gone through some great excitement!"

CHAPTER X.

DISPOSED OF.

It was very late when George Dallas arrived at Routh's lodgings in South Molton-street, so that he felt it necessary to announce his presence by a peculiar knock, known only to the initiated. He made the accustomed signal, but the door was not opened for so abnormally long an interval that he began to think he should have to go away, and defer the telling of the good news until the morning. He had knocked three times, and was about to turn away from the door when it was noiselessly opened by Harriet herself. She held a shaded candle in her hand, which gave so imperfect a light that Dallas could hardly see her distinctly enough to feel certain that his first impression, that she was looking very pale and ill, was not an imagination induced by the dim light. She asked him to come into the sitting-room, and said she had just turned the gas out, and was going to bed.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you," he said, when she had set down the candle on a table without re-lighting the gas, "but I want to see Routh particularly. Is he in?"

"No," said Harriet, "he is not. Did you get his letter?"

"What letter? I have not heard from him. I have only just come up from Amherst. But you look ill, Mrs Routh. Does anything ail you? Is anything wrong?"

"No," she said, hurriedly, "nothing, nothing. Routh has been worried, that's all, and I am very tired."

She pushed the candle further away as she spoke, and, placing her elbow on the table, rested her head on her hand. George looked at her with concern. He had a kind heart and great tenderness for women and children, and he could forget, or, at all events, lay aside his own anxieties in a moment at the sight of suffering in a woman's face. His look of anxious sympathy irritated Harriet; she moved uneasily and impatiently, and said almost harshly:

"Never mind my looks, Mr Dallas; they don't matter. Tell me how you have sped on your errand at Poynings. Has your mother kept her promise? Have you got the money? I hope so, for I am sorry to say Stewart wants it badly, and has been reckoning on it eagerly. I can't imagine how it happened you did not get his letter."

"I have succeeded," said George. "My mother has kept her word, God bless her, and I came at once to tell Routh he can have the money."

He stopped in the full tide of his animated speech, and looked curiously at Harriet. Something in her manner struck him as being unusual. She was evidently anxious about the money, glad to see him, and yet oddly absent. She did not look at him, and while he spoke she had turned her head sharply once or twice, while her upraised eyelids and parted lips gave her face a fleeting expression of intense listening. She instantly noticed his observation of her, and said sharply:

"Well, pray go on; I am longing to hear your story."

"I thought you were listening to something, you looked as if you heard something," said George.

"So I am listening—to you," Harriet replied, with an attempt at a smile. "So I do hear your adventures. There's nobody up in the house but myself. Pray go on."

So George went on, and told her all that had befallen him at Amherst, with one important reservation; he said nothing of Clare Carruthers or his two meetings with the heiress at the Sycamores; but he told her all about his interview with his mother, and the expedient to which she had resorted to supply his wants. Harriet Routh listened to his story intently; but when she heard

that he had received from Mrs Carruthers, not money, but jewels, she was evidently disconcerted.

"Here is the bracelet," said George, as he took the little packet from the breast-pocket of his coat, and handed it to her. "I don't know much about such things, Mrs Routh, but perhaps you do. Are the diamonds very valuable?"

Harriet had opened the morocco case containing the bracelet while he was speaking, and now she lifted the beautiful ornament from its satin bed, and held it on her open palm.

"I am not a very capable judge," she said; "but I think these are fine and valuable diamonds. They are extremely beautiful." And a gleam of colour came into her white face as she looked at the gems with a woman's irrepressible admiration of such things.

"I can't tell you how much I feel taking them from her," said George. "It's like a robbery, isn't it?" And he looked full and earnestly at Harriet.

She started, let the bracelet fall, stooped to pick it up, and as she raised her face again, it was whiter than before.

"How can you talk such nonsense?" she said, with a sudden resumption of her usual captivating manner. "Of course it isn't. Do you suppose your mother ever had as much pleasure in these gewgaws in her life as she had in giving them to you? Besides, you know you're going to reform and be steady, and take good advice, are you not?" She watched him very keenly, though her tone was gay and trifling. George reddened, laughed awkwardly, and replied:

"Well, I hope so; and the first step, you know, is to pay my debts. So I must get Routh to put me in the way of selling this bracelet at once. I suppose there's no difficulty about it. I'm sure I have heard it said that diamonds are the same as ready money, and the sooner the tin is in Routh's pocket the better pleased I'll be. None the less obliged to him, though, Mrs Routh; remember that, both for getting me out of the scrape, and for waiting so long and so good-humouredly for his money."

For all the cordiality of his tone, for all the gratitude he expressed, Harriet felt in her inmost heart, and told herself she felt,

that he was a changed man ; that he felt his freedom, rejoiced in it, and did not mean again to relinquish or endanger it.

"The thing he feared has happened," she thought, while her small white fingers were busy with the jewels. "The very thing he feared. This man must be got away—how am I to do it?"

The solitary candle was burning dimly ; the room was dull, cold, and gloomy. George looked round, and was apparently thinking of taking his leave, when Harriet said :

"I have not told you how opportune your getting this money—for I count it as money—is. Stay ; let me light the gas. Sit down there opposite to me, and you shall hear how things have gone with us since you went away." She had thrown off the abstraction of her manner, and in a moment she lighted the gas, put the extinguished candle out of sight, set wine upon the table, and pulled a comfortable arm-chair forward, in which she begged George to seat himself. "Take off your coat," she said ; and he obeyed her, telling her, with a laugh, as he flung it upon a chair, that there was a small parcel of soiled linen in the pocket.

"I did not expect to have to stay at Amherst, so I took no clothes with me," he explained, "and had to buy a shirt and a pair of stockings for Sunday, so as not to scandalize the natives. Rather an odd place to replenish one's wardrobe, by the by."

Harriet looked sharply at the coat, and, passing the chair on which it lay on her way to her own, felt its texture with a furtive touch. Then she sat down, gave Dallas wine, and once more fell to examining the bracelet. It might have occurred to any other man in George's position that it was rather an odd proceeding on the part of Mrs Routh to keep him there at so late an hour with no apparent purpose, and without any expressed expectation of Routh's return ; but George seldom troubled himself with reflections upon anybody's conduct, and invariably followed Harriet's lead without thinking about it at all. Recent events had shaken Routh's influence, and changed the young man's views and tastes, but Harriet still occupied her former place in his regard and in his habit of life, which in such cases as his signified much. With a confidential air she now talked to him, her busy fingers twisting

the bracelet as she spoke, her pale face turned to him, but her eyes somewhat averted. She told him that Routh had been surprised and annoyed at his (Dallas) being so long away from town, and had written to him, to tell him that he had been so pressed for money, so worried by duns, and so hampered by the slow proceeding of the company connected with the new speculation, that he had been obliged to go away, and must keep away, until Dallas could let him have one hundred and forty pounds. George was concerned to hear all this, and found it hard to reconcile with the good spirits in which Routh had been when he had seen him last; but he really knew so little of the man's affairs beyond having a general notion that they were hopelessly complicated, and subject to volcanic action of an utterly disconcerting nature, that he regarded his own surprise as unreasonable, and forbore to express it.

"It is of the utmost importance to Stewart to have the money at once," Harriet continued. "You see that, yourself; he told you all in his letter."

"Very extraordinary it should have been lost! Directed to P. O., Amherst, of course? I wish I had got it, Mrs Routh; I'd have gone at once and sold the bracelet before I came to you at all, and brought the money. But I can do it early in the morning, can't I? I can take it to some good jeweller and get cash for it, and be here by twelve o'clock, so as not to keep Routh a moment longer than I need in suspense. Will a hundred and forty square him for the present, Mrs Routh? I'm sure to get more for the bracelet—don't you think so?—and of course he can have it all, if he wants it."

The young man spoke in an eager tone, and the woman listened with a swelling heart. Her full red lip trembled for a passing instant—consideration for—kindness to the only human creature she loved touched Harriet as nothing besides had power to touch her.

"I am sure the bracelet is worth more than that sum," she said; "it is worth more than two hundred pounds, I dare say. But you forget, Mr Dallas, that you must not be too precipitate in this matter. It is of immense importance to Stewart to have this money, but there are precautions to be taken."

"Precautions, Mrs Routh! what precautions? The bracelet's my

own, isn't it, and principally valuable because there's no bother about selling a thing of the kind?"

She looked at him keenly; she was calculating to what extent she might manage him, how far he would implicitly believe her statements, and rely upon her judgment. His countenance was eminently reassuring, so she went on:

"Certainly the bracelet is your own, and it could be easily sold, were you only to consider yourself, but you have your mother to consider."

"My mother! How? when she has parted with the bracelet on purpose."

"True," said Harriet; "but perhaps you are not aware that diamonds, of anything like the value of these, are as well known, their owners, buyers, and whereabouts, as blood horses, their pedigrees, and purchasers. I think it would be unsafe for you to sell this bracelet in London; you may be sure the diamonds would be known by any jeweller on whose respectability you could sufficiently rely, to sell the jewels to him. It would be very unpleasant, and of course very dangerous to your mother, if the diamonds were known to be those purchased by Mr Carruthers, and a cautious jeweller thought proper to ask him any questions."

George looked grave and troubled, as Harriet put these objections to his doing as he had proposed, for the immediate relief of Routh, clearly before him. He never for a moment doubted the accuracy of her information, and the soundness of her fears.

"I understand," he said; "but what can I do? I must sell the bracelet to get the money, and sooner or later will make no difference in the risk you speak of; but it may make all the difference to Routh. I can't, I won't delay in this matter; don't ask me, Mrs Routh. It is very generous of you to think of my risk, but—"

"It is not your risk," she interrupted him by saying; "it is your mother's. If it were your own I might let you take it, for Stewart's sake,"—an indefinable compassion was in the woman's face, an unwonted softness in her blue eyes—"but your mother has done and suffered much for you, and she must be protected, even if Stewart has to lie hidden a day or two longer. You must

not do anything rash. I think I know what would be the best thing for you to do."

"Tell me, Mrs Routh," said George, who highly appreciated the delicate consideration for his mother which inspired Harriet's misgivings. "Tell me, and whatever it is, I will do it."

"It is this," said Harriet; "I know there is a large trade in diamonds at Amsterdam, and that the merchants there, chiefly Jews, deal in the loose stones, and are not, in our sense, jewellers. You could dispose of the diamonds there without suspicion or difficulty; it is the common resort of people who have diamonds to sell—London is not. If you would go there at once you might sell the diamonds, and send the money to Stewart, or rather to me, to an address we would decide upon, without more than the delay of a couple of days. Is there anything to keep you in town?"

"No," said George, "nothing. I could start this minute, as far as any business I've got to do is concerned."

Harriet drew a long breath, and her colour rose.

"I wish you would, Mr Dallas," she said, earnestly. "I hardly like to urge you, it seems so selfish; and Stewart, if he were here, would make so much lighter of the difficulty he is in than I can bring myself to do, but you don't know how grateful I should be to you if you would."

The pleading earnestness of her tone, the eager entreaty in her eyes, impressed George painfully; he hastened to assure her that he would accede to any request of hers.

"I am so wretched when he is away from me, Mr Dallas," said Harriet; "I am so lonely and full of dread. Anything not involving you or your mother in risk, which would shorten the time of his absence, would be an unspeakable boon to me."

"Then of course I will go at once, Mrs Routh," said George. "I will go to-morrow. I am sure you are quite right, and Amsterdam's the place to do the trick at. I wish I could have seen Routh first, for a moment, but as I can't, I can't. Let me see. Amsterdam. There's a boat to Rotterdam by the river, and—Oh, by Jove! here's a Bradshaw; let's see when the next goes."

He walked to the little sideboard, and selected the above-named compendium of useful knowledge from a mass of periodicals,

circulars, bills, and prospectuses of companies immediately to be brought out, and offering unheard-of advantages to the investors.

The moment his eyes were turned away from her, a fierce impatience betrayed itself in Harriet's face, and as he sat slowly turning over the sibylline leaves, and consulting the incomprehensible and maddening index, she pressed her clasped hands against her knees, as though it were almost impossible to resist the impulse which prompted her to tear the book from his dilatory fingers.

"Here it is," said George, at length, "and uncommonly cheap, too. The *Argus* for Rotterdam, seven A.M. That's rather early, though, isn't it? To-morrow morning, too, or rather this morning, for it's close upon one now. Let's see when the *Argus*, or some other boat, goes next. H'm; not till Thursday at the same hour. That's rather far off."

Harriet was breathing quickly, and her face was quite white, but she sat still and controlled her agony of anxiety. "I have urged him as strongly as I dare," she thought; "fate must do the rest."

Fate did the rest.

"After all, I may as well go at seven in the morning, Mrs Routh. All my things are packed up already, and it will give me a good start. I might get my business done before Wednesday night, almost, if I'm quick about it; at all events early the following day."

"You might, indeed," said Harriet, in a faint voice.

"There's one little drawback, though, to that scheme," said Dallas. "I haven't the money. They owe me a trifle at the *Mercury*, and I shall have to wait till to-morrow and get it, and go by Ostend, the swell route. I can't go without it, that's clear."

Harriet looked at him with a wan blank face, in which there was something of weariness, and under it something of menace, but her tone was quite amiable and obliging as she said:

"I think it is a pity to incur both delay and expense by waiting. I have always a little ready money by me, in case of our having to make a move suddenly, or of an illness, or one of the

many contingencies which men never think of, and women never forget. You can have it with pleasure. You can return it to me," she said, with a forced smile, "when you send Routh the hundred and forty."

"Thank you," said Dallas. "I shan't mind taking it from you for a day or two, as it is to send help to Routh the sooner. Then I'll go, that's settled, and I had better leave you, for you were tired when I came in, and you must be still more tired now. I shall get back from Amsterdam as quickly as I can, tell Routh, but I see my way to making a few pounds out of the place. They want padding at the *Mercury*, and I shan't come back by return of post." He had risen now, and had extended his hand towards the bracelet, which lay in its open case on the table.

A sudden thought struck Harriet.

"Stop," she said; "I don't think it would do to offer this bracelet in its present shape, anywhere. The form and the setting are too remarkable. It would probably be re-sold entire, and it is impossible to say what harm might come of its being recognized. It must be taken to pieces, and you must offer the diamonds separately for sale. It will make no appreciable difference in the money you will receive, for such work as this is like bookbinding—dear to buy, but never counted in the price when you want to sell."

"What am I to do, then?" asked George, in a dismayed tone. "I could not to take out the diamonds, you know; they are firmly set—see here." He turned the gold band inside out, and showed her the plain flat surface at the back of the diamonds and turquoises.

"Wait a moment," said Harriet. "I think I can assist you in this respect. Do you study the bracelet a bit until I come to you."

She left the room, and remained away for a little time. Dallas stood close by the table, having lowered the gas-burners, and by their light he closely inspected the rivets, the fastenings, and the general form of the splendid ornament he was so anxious to get rid of, idly thinking how well it must have looked on his mother's still beautiful arm, and wondering whether she was likely soon to

be obliged to wear the counterfeit. His back was turned to the door by which Harriet had left the room, so that, when she came softly to the aperture again, he did not perceive her. She carefully noted his attitude, and glided softly in, carrying several small implements in her right hand, and in her left held cautiously behind her back a coat, which she dexterously dropped upon the floor quite unperceived by Dallas, behind the chair on which he had thrown his. She then went up to the table, and showed him a small pair of nippers, a pair of scissors of peculiar form, and a little implement, with which she told him workers in jewelry loosened stones in their setting, and punched them out. Dallas looked with some surprise at the collection, regarding them as unusual items of a lady's paraphernalia, and said, gaily:

"You are truly a woman of resources, Mrs Routh. Who would ever have thought of your having all those things ready at a moment's notice?"

Harriet made no reply, but she could not quite conceal the disconcerting effect of his words.

"If I have made a blunder in this," she thought, "it is a serious one, but I have more to do, and must not think yet."

She sat down, cleared a space on the table, placed the bracelet and the little tools before her, and set to work at once at her task of demolition. It was a long one, and the sight was pitiful as she placed jewel after jewel carefully in a small box before her, and proceeded to loosen one after another. Sometimes George took the bracelet from her and aided her, but the greater part of the work was done by her. The face bent over the disfigured gold and maltreated gems was a remarkable one in its mingled expression of intentness and absence; her will was animating her fingers in their task, but her mind, her fancy, her memory, were away, and, to judge by the rigidity of the cheeks and lips, the unrelaxed tension of the low white brow, on no pleasing excursion. The pair worked on in silence, only broken occasionally by a word from George, expressive of admiration for her dexterity and the celerity with which she detached the jewels from the gold setting. At length all was done—the golden band, limp and scratched, was a mere commonplace piece of goldsmith's work—the diamonds

lay in their box in a shining heap, the discarded turquoises on the table; and all was done.

"What shall we do with these things?" asked George. "They are not worth selling—at least, not now—but I think the blue things might make up prettily with the gold again. Will you keep them, Mrs Routh? and some day, when I am better off, I'll have them set for you, in remembrance of this night in particular, and of all your goodness to me in general."

He was looking at the broken gold and the turquoises, thinking how trumpery they looked now—not at her. Fortunately not at her, for if he had seen her face he must have known—even he, unsuspicious as he was—that she was shaken by some inexplicably powerful feeling. The dark blood rushed into her face, dispersed itself over her fair throat in blotches, and made a sudden dreadful tingling in her ears. For a minute she did not reply, and then Dallas did look at her, but the agony had passed over her.

"No—no," she said; "the gold is valuable, and the turquoises as much so as they can be for their size. You must keep them for a rainy day."

"I'm likely to see many," said George, with half a smile and half a sigh, "but I don't think I'll ever use these things to keep me from the pelting of the pitiless shower. If you won't keep them for yourself, Mrs Routh, perhaps you'll keep them for me until I return."

"O yes," said Harriet, "I will keep them. I will lock them up in my desk; you will know where to find them."

She drew the desk towards her as she spoke, took out of it a piece of paper, without seeing that one side had some writing upon it, swept the scattered turquoises into the sheet, then folded the gold band in a second, placed both in a large blue envelope, with the device of Routh's last new company scheme upon it, and sealed the parcel over the wafer.

"Write your name on it," she said to George, who took up a pen and obeyed her. She opened a drawer at the side of the desk, and put away the little parcel quite at the back. Then she took from the same drawer seven sovereigns, which George said would be as much as he would require for the present, and which he

carefully stowed away in his pocket-book. Then he sat down at the desk, and playfully wrote an I O U for the amount.

"That's business-like," said George, smiling, but the smile by which she replied was so wan and weary, that George again commented on her fatigue, and began to take leave of her.

"I'm off, then," he said, "and you won't forget to tell Routh how much I wanted to see him. Among other things to tell him—However, I suppose he has seen Deane since I have been away?"

Harriet was occupied in turning down the gas-burner by which she had just lighted the candle again. She now said :

"How stupid I am ! as if I couldn't have lighted you to the door first, and put the gas out afterwards ! The truth is, I am so tired ; I'm quite stupified. What did you say, Mr Dallas ? There, I've knocked your coat off the chair ; here it is, however. You asked me something, I think?"

George took the coat she held from her, hung it over his arm, felt for his hat (the room being lighted only by the feeble candle), and repeated his words :

"Routh has seen Deane, of course, since I've been away?"

"No," Harriet replied with distinctness, "he has not—he has not."

"Indeed !" said George. "I am surprised at that. But Deane was huffed, I remember, on Tuesday, when Routh broke his engagement to dine with him, and said it must depend on whether he was in the humour to meet him the next day, as Routh asked him to do. So I suppose he wasn't in the humour, eh ? And now he'll be huffed with me, but I can't help it."

"Why?" asked Harriet ; and she spoke the single word with a strange effort, and a painful dryness of the throat.

"Because I promised to give him his revenge at billiards. I won ten pounds from him that night, and uncommonly lucky it was for me ; it enabled me to get away from my horrible old shrew of a landlady, and, indeed, indirectly it enables me to start on this business to-morrow."

"How?" said Harriet. Again she spoke but one word, and again with difficulty and a dryness in the throat. She set down

the candle, and leaned against the table, while George stood between her and the door, his coat over his arm.

"You didn't notice that I told you I was all packed up and ready to go. It happened luckily, didn't it?" And then George told his listener how he had paid his landlady, and removed his modest belongings on the previous Wednesday morning to a coffee-house, close to the river too. "By Jove! I'm in luck's way, it seems," he said; "so I shall merely go and sleep there, and take my traps on board the Argus. I have only such clothes as I shall want, no matter where I am," he said. "They'll keep the trunk with my books until I come back, and Deane must wait for his revenge with the balls and cues for the same auspicious occasion. Let's hope he'll be in a better temper, and have forgiven Routh. He was awfully riled at his note on Tuesday evening."

"Did—did you see it?" asked Harriet; and, as she spoke, she leaned still more heavily against the table.

"No," replied Dallas, "I did not; but Deane told me Routh asked him to meet him the next day. He didn't, it seems."

"No," said Harriet; "and Stewart is very much annoyed about it. Mr Deane owed him money, and he asked him for some in that note."

"Indeed," said George; "he could have paid him then, I happen to know. He had a lot of gold and notes with him. The tenner he lost to me he paid in a note, and he changed a fiver to pay for our dinner, and he was bragging and bouncing the whole time about the money he had about him, and what he would, and would not, do with it. So it was sheer spite made him neglect to pay Routh, and I hope he'll dun him again. The idea of Routh being in the hole he's in, and a fellow like that owing him money. How much is it, Mrs Routh?"

"I—I don't know," said Harriet.

"There, I'm keeping you talking still. I am the most thoughtless fellow." It never occurred to George that she had kept him until she had learned what she wanted to know. "Good-bye, Mrs Routh, good-bye."

She had passed him, the candle in her hand, and this farewell was uttered in the hall. He held out his hand; she hesitated for

a moment, and then gave him hers. He pressed it fervently ; it was deadly cold.

"Don't stay in the chill air," he said ; "you are shivering now."

Then he went away with a light cheerful step.

Harriet Routh stood quite still, as he had left her, for one full minute ; then she hurried into the sitting-room, shut the door, dropped on her knees before a chair, and ground her face fiercely against her arms. There she knelt, not sobbing, not weeping, but shuddering—shuddering with the quick terrible iteration of mortal agony of spirit, acting on an exhausted frame. After a while she rose, and then her face was dreadful to look upon, in its white fixed despair.

"If I have saved him," she said, as she sat wearily down by the table again, and once more leaned her face upon her hands—"if I have saved him ! It may be there is a chance ; at all events, there is a chance. How wonderful, how inconceivably wonderful that he should not have heard of it ! The very stones of the street seem to cry it out, and he has not heard of it ; the very air is full of it, and he knows nothing. If anything should prevent his going ? But no ; nothing will, nothing *can*. This was the awful danger—this was the certain, the inevitable risk ; if I have averted it ; if I have saved him, for the time !"

The chill of coming dawn struck cold to her limbs, the sickness of long watching, of fear, and of sleeplessness was at her heart, but Harriet Routh did not lie down on her bed all that dreadful night. Terrible fatigue weighed down her eyelids, and made her flesh tremble and quiver over the aching bones.

"I must not sleep—I should not wake in time," she said, as she forced herself to rise from her chair, and paced the narrow room, when the sudden dumbness of sleep threatened to fall upon her. "I have something to do."

Dawn came, then sunrise, then the sounds, the stir of morning. Then Harriet bathed her face in cold water, and looked in her toilet-glass at her haggard features. The image was not reassuring ; but she only smiled a bitter smile, and made a mocking gesture with her hand.

"Never any more," she murmured—"never any more."

The morning was cold and raw, but Harriet heeded it not. She glanced out of the window of her bed-room before she left it, wearing her bonnet and shawl, and closely veiled. Then she closed the shutters, locked the door, withdrew the key, and came into the sitting-room. She went to a chair and took up a coat which lay at the back of it; then she looked round for a moment as if in search of something. Her eye lighted on a small but heavy square of black marble which lay on the writing-table, and served as a paper-press. She then spread the coat on the table, placed the square of marble on it, and rolled it tightly round the heavy centre, folding and pressing the parcel into the smallest possible dimensions. This done, she tied it tightly with a strong cord, and, concealing it under her shawl, went swiftly out of the house. No one saw her issue from the grim, gloomy door—the neighbouring housemaids had not commenced their matutinal task of door-step cleaning, alleviated by gossip—and she went away down the street, completely unobserved. Went away, with her head down, her face hidden, with a quick, steady step and an unfaltering purpose. There were not many wayfarers abroad in the street, and of those she saw none, and was remarked by only one.

Harriet Routh took her way towards the river, and reached Westminster-bridge as the clock in the great tower of the new palace marked half-past six. All was quiet. A few of the laggards of the working classes were straggling across the bridge to their daily toil, a few barges were moving sluggishly upon the muddy water; but there was no stir, no business yet. Harriet lingered when she reached the centre of the bridge; a figure was just vanishing at the southern end, the northern was clear of people. She leaned over the parapet, and looked down—no boat, no barge was near. Then she dropped the parcel she had carried into the river, and the water closed over it. Without the delay of an instant, she turned and retraced her steps toward home. As she neared South Molton-street, she found several of the shops open, and entering one, she purchased a black marble letter-press. It was not precisely similar to that with which she had weighted the parcel, which now lay in the bed of the river; but the dif-

ference was trifling, and not to be perceived by the eye of a stranger.

Near the house in which the Rouths occupied apartments there was an archway which formed the entrance to some mews. As she passed this open space, Harriet's glance fell upon the inquisitive countenance of a keen-looking, ragged street-boy, who was lying contentedly on his back under the archway, with his arms under his head, and propped upon the kerbstone. A sudden impulse arrested her steps. "Have you no other place to lie than here?" she asked the boy, who jumped up with great alacrity, and stood before her in an attitude almost respectful.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, "I have, but I'm here, waiting for an early job."

She gave him a shilling and a smile—not such a smile as she once had to give, but the best that was left her—and went on to the door of the house she lived in. She opened it with a key, and went in.

The boy remained where she had left him, apparently ruminating, and wagging his tousled head sagely.

"Whatever is *she* up to?" he asked of himself, in perplexity. "It's a rum start, as far as I knows on it, and I means to know more. But how is *she* in it? I shan't say nothing till I knows more about it." And then Mr Jim Swain went his way to a more likely quarter for early jobs.

Fortune favoured Mrs Routh on that morning. She gained her bed-room unseen and unheard, and having hastily undressed, lay down to rest, if rest would come to her—at least to await in quiet the ordinary hour at which the servant was accustomed to call her. It came, and passed; but Harriet did not rise.

She slept a little when all the world was up and busy—slept until the second delivery of letters brought one for her, which the servant took at once to her room.

The letter was from George Dallas, and contained merely a few lines, written when he was on the point of starting, and posted at the river-side. He apologized to Harriet for a mistake which he had made on the previous night. He had taken up Routh's coat instead of his own, and had not discovered the error

until he was on his way to the steamer, and it was too late to repair it. He hoped it would not matter, as he had left his own coat at South Molton-street, and no doubt Routh could wear it, on an occasion.

When Harriet had read this note, she lay back upon her pillow, and fell into a deep sleep, which was broken by Routh's coming into her room early in the afternoon. He looked pale and haggard, and he stood by the bedside in silence. But she—she sat up, and flung her arms round him with a wonderfully good imitation of her former manner; and when she told him all that had passed, her husband caught her to his breast with passionate fondness and gratitude, and declared over and over again that her ready wit and wonderful fortitude had saved him.

Saved him? How, and from what?

CHAPTER XI.

AT POYNINGS.

LIFE at Poynings had its parallel in hundreds of country-houses, of which it was but a type. It was a life essentially English in its character, in its staid respectability, in its dull decorum. There are old French chateaux without number, visible in bygone days to travellers in the banquettes of diligencies, and glimpses of which may still occasionally be caught from the railways, gray, square, four pepper-box turreted old buildings, wherein life is dreary but not decorous, and sad without being staid. It is the day-dream of many an English country gentleman that his house should, in the first place, be respectable, in the second place, comfortable, in the third place, free from damp; after these successes are achieved, he takes no further thought for it; within and without the dullness may be soul-harrowing; that is no affair of his. So long as his dining-room is large enough to contain the four-and-twenty guests who, on selected moonlight nights, are four times in

every year bidden to share his hospitality—so long as the important seignorial dignities derivable from the possession of lodge, and stable, and kennel are maintained—so long as the state devolving upon him as justice of the peace, with a scarcely defined hope of one day arriving at the position of deputy-lieutenant, is kept up, vaulting ambition keeps itself within bounds, and the young English country gentleman is satisfied.

More than satisfied, indeed, was Mr Capel Carruthers in the belief that all the requirements above named were properly fulfilled. In his earlier life he had been haunted by a dim conviction that he was rather an ass than otherwise; he remembered that that had been the verdict returned at Rugby, and his reflections on his very short career at Cambridge gave him no reason to doubt the decision of his schoolfellows. Not a pleasant source of reflection even to a man of Mr Carruthers's blunted feelings; in fact, a depressing, wrong, Radical state of mind, for which there was only one antidote—the thought that he was Mr Carruthers of Poynings, a certain settled stable position which would have floated its possessor over any amount of imbecility. Carruthers of Poynings! There it was in old county histories, with a genealogy of the family and a charming copper engraving of Poynings at the beginning of the century, with two ladies in powder and hoops fishing in an impossible pond, and a gentleman in a cocked-hat and knee-breeches pointing out nothing in particular to nobody at all. Carruthers of Poynings! All the old armour in the hall, hauberks and breastplates, now propped upon a slight wooden frame, instead of enclosing the big chests and the thews and sinews which they had preserved through the contests of the rival Roses or the Cavaliers and Roundheads—all the old ancestors hanging round the dining-room, soldiers, courtiers, Kentish yeomen, staring with grave eyes at the smug white-whiskered old gentleman, their descendant—all the old tapestry worked by Maud Carruthers, whose husband was killed in the service of Mary Stuart—all the carvings and gildings about the house, all the stained glass in the windows, all the arms and quartering and crests upon the family plate—all whispered to the present representative of the family that he was Carruthers of Poynings, and

as such had only to make a very small effort to find life no very difficult matter, even for a person scantily endowed with brains. He tried it accordingly—tried it when a young man, had pursued the course ever since, and found it successful. Any latent suspicion of his own want of wisdom had vanished long since, as how, indeed, could it last? When Mr Carruthers took his seat as chairman of the magisterial bench at Amherst, he found himself listening with great admiration to the prefatory remarks which he addressed to the delinquent in custody before passing sentence on him, unconscious that those remarks only echoed the magistrate's clerk, who stood close behind him whispering into his ear. When, as was his regular custom, he walked round the barn, where, on rent-days, the tenants were assembled at dinner, and heard his health proposed in glowing terms, and drunk with great enthusiasm—for he was a good and liberal landlord—and when he addressed a few conventional words of thanks in reply, and stroked his white whiskers, and bowed, amidst renewed cheering, how should a thought of his own shortcomings ever dawn upon him?

His shortcomings!—the shortcomings of Mr Carruthers of Poynings? If, indeed, in his earlier days there had been a latent belief in the existence of anything so undesirable and so averse to the proper status of a county magnate, it had long since died out. It would have been hard and unnatural, indeed, for a man so universally respected and looked up to, not to give in to the general creed, and admit that there were undoubted grounds for the widespread respect which he enjoyed. There are two kinds of "squires," to use the old English word, who exercise equal influence on the agricultural mind, though in very different ways. The one is the type which Fielding loved to draw, and which has very little altered since his time—the jocund sporting man, rib-poking, lass-chin-chucking franklin, the tankard-loving, cross-country-riding, oath-using, broad-skirted, cord-breeched, white-hatted squire. The other is the landed proprietor, magistrate, patron of the living, chairman of the board of guardians, supporter of the church and state, pattern man. Mr Carruthers of Poynings belonged to the latter class. You could have told that by a glance at him on his

first appearance in the morning, with his chin shaved clean, his well-brushed hair and whiskers, his scrupulously white linen, his carefully tied check neckcloth, his portentous collars, his trimmed and polished nails. His very boots creaked of position and respectability, and his large white waistcoat represented unspotted virtue. Looking at him ensconced behind the bright-edged Bible at early morning prayers, the servants believed in the advantages derivable from a correct life, and made an exception in their master's favour to the doom of Dives. By his own measure he meted the doings of others, and invariably arose considerably self-refreshed from the mensuration. Hodge, ploughman, consigned to the cage after a brawl with Giles, hedger, consequent upon a too liberal consumption of flat and muddy ale at The Three Horseshoes, known generally as The Shoes, and brought up for judgment before the bench, pleading "a moog too much" in extenuation, might count on scanty commiseration from the magistrate, who never exceeded his four glasses of remarkably sound claret. Levi Hinde, gipsy and tramp, arraigned for stealing a loaf from a baker's shop—as he said, to save the life of his starving child—impressed not one whit the portly chairman of the Amherst branch of the County Bank. Mr Carruthers never got drunk, and never committed theft; and that there could be any possible temptation for other people so to act, was beyond the grasp of his most respectable imagination.

A man of his stamp generally shows to the least advantage in his domestic relations. Worshipped from a distance by outsiders, who, when occasion forces them into the presence, approach, metaphorically, in the Siamese fashion, on hands and knees, there is usually a good deal too much Grand Lama-like mystery and dignity about the recipient of all this homage to render him agreeable to those with whom he is brought into daily contact. Mr Carruthers was not an exception to the rule. He had a notion that love, except the extremely respectable but rather weak regard felt by mothers towards their infants, was a ridiculous boy-and-girl sentiment, which never really came to anything, nor could be considered worthy of notice until the feminine mind was imbued with a certain amount of reverence for the object of her affection. Mr Carruthers had never read Tennyson (in common with his class,

he was extremely severe upon poets in general, looking upon them not merely as fools, but as idle mischievous fools, who might be better employed in earning a decent livelihood, say as carters or turnpike-men); but he was thoroughly impressed with the idea that "woman is the lesser man," and he felt that any open display of affection on his part towards his wife might militate against what he considered entirely essential to his domestic happiness—his "being looked up to." He was in the habit of treating his wife in ordinary matters of social intercourse very much as he treated the newly-appointed justice of the peace at the meetings of the magisterial bench, viz. as a person whose position was now recognized by the laws of society as equal to their own, but who must nevertheless feel inwardly that between him and Mr Carruthers of Poynings there was really a great gulf fixed, the bridging of which, however easy it may appear, was really a matter of impossibility.

If these feelings existed, as they undoubtedly did in Mr Carruthers under the actual circumstances of his marriage, it may be imagined that they would have been much keener, much more intensified, had he taken to wife, instead of the quiet widow lady whom, to the astonishment of the county, he chose, any of the dashing girls who had danced, dressed, and flirted at him perseveringly, but in vain. Poynings was a sufficiently nice place to render its master a catch in the county, and to induce husband-hunting misses to discount his age and pomposity, so that when the cards of Mr and Mrs Capel Carruthers were sent round (it was before the contemptuous days of "no cards"), and it was discovered that the new mistress of Poynings was somebody quite out of "the set," immediately "that dear Mr Carruthers" became "that horrid old thing," and it required years of open-handed hospitality to reestablish him in favour.

But Capel Carruthers had chosen wisely, and he knew it. With all his weakness and vanity, a gentleman in thought and tastes, he had taken for his wife a lady whose birth and breeding must have been acknowledged in any society; a lady whose age was not ill-suited to his own, whose character was unimpeachable, who was thoroughly qualified to superintend the bringing out of his

niece, and whose sole vulnerable point for criticism—her poverty—was rendered invulnerable as soon as she became Mrs Carruthers of Poynings. And, under all the cold placid exterior which never thawed, under all the set Grandisonian forms of speech which were never relaxed, under the judicial manner and the Board-of-Guardians address, flowed a warm current of love for his wife which he himself scarcely suspected. With such poor brains as he had, he had occasionally fallen to the task of self-examination, asking himself how it was that he, Mr Carruthers of Poynings (even in his thoughts he liked the ring of that phrase), could have so far permitted himself to be swayed by any one, and then he told himself that he was revered and looked up to, that his state, position, and dignities were duly acknowledged, and in a satisfied frame of mind he closed the self-colloquy. Loved his wife—eh! neither he nor any one else knew how much. George Dallas need not have been anxious about the treatment of his mother by his step-father. When the young man cursed his exile from his mother's presence and his step-father's home, he little knew the actual motives which prompted Mr Carruthers to decide upon and to keep rigidly in force that decree of banishment. Not only his step-son's wildness and extravagance; though a purist, Mr Carruthers was sufficient man of the world to know that in most cases there are errors of youth which correct themselves in the flight of time. Not a lurking fear that his niece, thrown in this prodigal's way, should be dazzled by the glare of his specious gifts, and singe her youth and innocence in their baleful light. Not a dread of having to notice and recognize the young man as his connection in the chastened arena of county society.

As nature had not endowed Mr Carruthers with a capacity for winning affection, though it was not to be denied that there were qualities in his character which commanded respect, it was fortunate for him that he cared less about the former than the latter. Nevertheless, he would probably have been rendered very uncomfortable, not to say unhappy, had he supposed that his wife, "Mrs Carruthers of Poynings," as there is reason to suppose he designated her, even in his inmost thoughts, positively did not love him. Such a supposition, however, never had occurred to

him, which was fortunate ; for Mr Carruthers was apt to hold by his suppositions as strongly as other people held by their convictions, as, indeed, being *his*, why should he not ? and it would have been very difficult to dislodge such a notion. The notion itself would have been, in the first place, untrue, and in the second, dangerous. Mrs Carruthers of Poynings loved her rather grim and decidedly uninteresting but unimpeachably respectable husband, if not passionately, which was hardly to be expected, very sincerely, and estimated him after the fashion of wives—that is to say, considerably above his deserts. All women like their husbands, except those who notoriously do not, and Mrs Carruthers was no exception to the rule. She had a much greater sense of justice in her than most women, and she used it practically—applied it to her own case. She knew the fault had been her son's in the great sorrow which had destroyed all the pride and pleasure which her prosperous marriage would otherwise have brought her, and she did not charge it upon her husband, or, except in so far as her unconquerable anxiety and depression caused him annoyance, did she inflict the penalty of it on him. She knew him to be a hard man, and she did not look for softness from him ; but she accepted such advantages as hardness of character possesses, and bore its disadvantages well. “ If I were he,” she had said to herself, even in the first hours of her anguish of conviction of her boy's unworthiness, and when his step-father's edict of exclusion was but newly published, “ and I had so little knowledge of human nature as he has, if life had never taught me toleration, if Clare were my niece and George his son, would I not have acted as he has done ? He is consistent to the justness and the sternness of his character.” Thinking thus, Mrs Carruthers acted on the maxim that to judge others aright we should put ourselves in their position. So she accepted the great trial of her life, and suffered it as quietly and patiently as she could. It would be difficult to define with precision the nature of Mr Carruthers's sentiments towards George Dallas. The young man had met his step-father but rarely, and had on each occasion increased the disfavour with which from the first the elder man had regarded him. He had never tried to propitiate, had, indeed, regarded him with

contemptuous indifference, secure in what he fancied to be the security of his mother's position ; and there had been covert antagonism between them from the first. How much astonished Mr Carruthers would have been had any revelation been made to him of the secrets of his own heart, whereby he would have discovered that a strong sentiment of jealousy lay at the root of his antipathy to George Dallas—jealousy which intensified his hardness and sternness, and forbade him to listen to the promptings of common sense, which told him that the line he was taking towards the son was so cruel to the mother as to neutralize all the advantages presented by the fine marriage she had made, and for which, by the way, he expected her to be constantly demonstratively grateful. In this expectation he was as constantly disappointed. Mrs Carruthers was an eminently *true* woman, and as she felt no peculiar exuberance of gratitude, she showed none. She was a lady too—much more perfectly a lady than Mr Carruthers was unimpeachably a gentleman—and, as such, she filled her position as a matter of course, as she would have filled one much higher, or one much lower, and thought nothing about it. She was of so much finer a texture, so much higher a nature, than her husband, that she did not suspect him of any double motive in his treatment of George Dallas. She never dreamed that Mr Carruthers of Poynings was secretly uneasily jealous of the man who had died in his prime many years before, and the son, who had been first the young widow's sole consolation and then her bitterest trial. The living and the dead combined to displease Mr Carruthers, and he would have been unequivocally glad, only in decorous secrecy, could he have obtained any evidence to prove that George Dallas was remarkably like his father in all the defective points of his personal appearance and in all the faults of his character. But such evidence was not within his reach, and Mr Carruthers was reduced to hoping in his secret heart that his suppositions were correct on this point, and discovering a confirmation of them in his wife's scrupulous silence with regard to her first husband. She had never, in their most confidential moments, remarked on any likeness between George and his father ; had never, indeed, mentioned Captain Dallas at all, which appeared

extremely significant to Mr Carruthers, but seeing that Captain Dallas had been dead twelve years when his widow became Mrs Carruthers of Poynings, would not have occasioned much surprise to the world in general. Mr Carruthers regarded himself as his wife's benefactor, but she did not partake of his views in that respect. The notion which he entertained of his position with regard to his niece Clare was better founded and more reasonable.

The beautiful young heiress, who was an unconscious and involuntary element in the standing grievance of Mrs Carruthers's life, was the only child of Mr Carruthers's brother, and the sole inheritor of his property. Her father had died while she was a little child, and her mother's method of educating her has been already described. She was attached to her uncle, but was afraid of him; and she was happier and more at ease at the Sycamores than at Poynings. Of course Mr Carruthers did not suspect his niece of any such depravity of taste. It never occurred to him that any one could fancy himself or herself happier anywhere on the face of the created globe than at Poynings; and so Clare escaped the condemnation which she would otherwise have received in no stinted measure.

Accustomed to attach a wonderful amount of importance to duties and responsibilities which were his, if their due fulfilment could add to his dignity and reputation, Mr Carruthers was a model of the uncle and guardian. He really liked Clare very much indeed, and he was fully persuaded that he loved her—a distinction he would have learned to draw only if Clare had been deprived of her possessions, and rendered dependent on him. He spoke of her as "my brother's heiress," and so thought of her, not as "my brother's orphan child;" but in all external and material respects Mr Carruthers of Poynings was an admirable guardian, and a highly respectable specimen of the uncle tribe. He would have been deeply shocked had he discovered that any young lady in the county was better dressed, better mounted, more obsequiously waited upon, more accomplished, or regarded by society as in any way more favoured by fortune than Miss Carruthers—not of Poynings, indeed, but the next thing to it, and likely at some future day to enjoy that distinction. Mr Carruthers did not

regret that he was childless ; he had never cared for children, and, though not a keenly observant person, he had noticed occasionally that the importance of a rich man's heir was apt, in this irrepressibly anticipative world, to outweigh the importance of the rich man himself. No Carruthers on record had ever had a large family, and, for his own part, he liked the idea of a female heir to the joint property of himself and his brother, who should carry her own name in addition to her husband's. He was determined on that. Unless Clare married a nobleman, her husband should take the name of Carruthers. Carruthers of Poynings must not die out of the land. The strange jealousy which was one of the underlying constituents of Mr Carruthers's character came into play with regard to his niece and his wife. Mrs Carruthers loved the girl, and would gladly have acted the part of a mother to her ; and as Clare's own mother had been a remarkably mild specimen of maternal duty and affection, she could have replaced that lady considerably to Clare's advantage. But she had soon perceived that this was not to be ; her husband's fidgety sense of his own importance, his ever-present fear lest it should be trenched upon or in any way slighted, interfered with her good intentions. She knew the uselessness of opposing the foible, though she did not understand its source, and she relinquished the projects she had formed.

Mr Carruthers was incapable of believing that his wife never once dreamed of resenting to Clare the exclusion of George, for which the girl's residence at Poynings had been assigned as a reason, or that she would have despised herself if such an idea had presented itself to her mind, as she probably must have despised him had she known how natural and inevitable he supposed it to be on her part.

Thus it came to pass that the three persons who lived together at Poynings had but little real intimacy or confidence between them. Clare was very happy ; she had her own tastes and pursuits, and ample means of gratifying them. Her mother's brother and his wife, Sir Thomas and Lady Boldero, with her cousin, their ugly but clever and charming daughter, were much attached to her, and she to them, and, when she got away from Poynings to

the Sycamores, Clare acknowledged to herself that she enjoyed the change very much, but was very happy at Poynings nevertheless. The Sycamores had another interest for her now, another association, and the girl's life had entered upon a new phase. Innocent, inexperienced, and romantic as she was, inclined to hero-worship, and by no means likely to form sound opinions as to her heroes, Clare Carruthers was endowed with an unusual allowance of common sense and perception. She understood Mr Carruthers of Poynings thoroughly ; so much more thoroughly than his wife, that she had found out the jealousy which permeated his character, and recognized it in action with unfailing accuracy. She had considerably more tact than girls at her age ordinarily possess, and she continued to fill a somewhat difficult position with satisfaction not only to others, but to herself. She contrived to avoid wounding her uncle's susceptible self-love, and to keep within the limits which Mrs Carruthers's discretion had set to their intimacy, without throwing external coldness or restraint into their relations.

Clare found herself very often doing or not doing, saying or refraining from saying, some particular thing, in order to avoid "getting Mrs Carruthers into a scrape," and of course she was aware that the constantly-recurring necessity for such carefulness argued, at the least, a difficult temper to deal with in the head of the household ; but she did not let the matter trouble her much. She would think, when she thought about it at all, with the irrepressible self-complacency of youth, how careful *she* would be not to marry an ill-tempered man, or, at all events, she would make up her mind to marry a man so devotedly attached to her that his temper would not be of the slightest consequence, as, of course, she should never suffer from it. On the whole, it would be difficult to find a more dangerous condition of circumstances than that in which Clare Carruthers was placed when her romantic meeting with Paul Ward took place—a meeting in which the fates seemed to have combined every element of present attraction and future danger. Practically, Clare was quite alone ; she placed implicit confidence in no one, she had no guide for her feelings or actions, and she had just drifted into a position in which she needed

careful direction. She refrained from mentioning her meeting with the stranger, more on Mrs Carruthers's account than on her own, from the usual motive—apprehension lest, by some unreasonable turn of Mr Carruthers's temper, she might be brought "into a scrape." Her curiosity had been strongly excited by the discovery that Mrs Carruthers had some sort of acquaintance with Paul Ward, or, at least, with his name; but she adhered to her resolution, and kept silence for the present.

Mrs Carruthers's son had always been an object of tacit interest to Clare. She had not been fully informed of the circumstances of her uncle's marriage, and she understood vaguely that George Dallas was an individual held in disfavour by the august master of Poynings; so her natural delicacy of feeling conquered her curiosity, and she abstained from mentioning George to his mother or to Mr Carruthers, and also from giving encouragement to the gossip on the subject which occasionally arose in her presence.

In Mrs Carruthers's dressing-room a portrait hung, which Clare had been told by Mrs Brookes was that of her mistress's son, when a fine, brave, promising boy of ten years old. Clare had felt an interest in the picture, not only for Mrs Carruthers's sake, but because she liked the face which it portrayed—the clear bright brown eyes, the long curling hair, the brilliant dark complexion, the bold, frank, gleeful expression. Once or twice she had said a few words in praise of the picture, and once she had ventured to ask Mrs Carruthers if her son still resembled it. The mother had answered her, with a sigh, that he was greatly changed, and no one would now recognize the picture as a likeness of him.

The dignified and decorous household at Poynings pursued its luxurious way with less apparent disunion among its principal members than is generally to be seen under the most favourable circumstances, but with little real community of feeling or of interest. Mrs Carruthers was a popular person in society, and Clare was liked as much as she was admired. As for Mr Carruthers, he was Mr Carruthers of Poynings, and that fact sufficed for the neighbourhood almost as completely as it satisfied himself.

The unexpected return of her uncle from York had caused Clare no particular emotion. She was standing at the French

window of the breakfast-room, feeding a colony of birds, her outdoor pensioners, when the carriage made its appearance. She had just observed the fact, and was quietly pursuing her occupation, when Mrs Carruthers, who had left the breakfast-room half an hour before, returned, looking so pale, and with so unmistakeable an expression of terror in her face, that Clare looked at her in astonishment.

"Your uncle has come back," she said. "I am not well, I cannot meet him yet. Go to the door, Clare, and tell him I am not well, and am still in my room. Pray go, my dear; don't delay a moment."

"Certainly I will go," answered Clare, leaving the window and crossing the room as she spoke; "but—"

"I'll tell you what ails me another time, but go now—go," said Mrs Carruthers; and, without another word, the girl obeyed her. She had seen the carriage at a turn in the avenue; now the wheels were grinding the gravel of the sweep opposite the hall-door. In a minute Clare was receiving her uncle on the steps, and Mrs Carruthers, having thrown the bonnet and shawl she had just taken out for her proposed expedition to the shrubbery back into the wardrobe, removed her gown, and replaced it by a dressing-gown, was awaiting her husband's approach with a beating heart and an aching head. Had he met her son? Had he passed him unseen upon the road? Would Mrs Brookes succeed, unseen and unsuspected, in executing the commission with which she had hurriedly charged her?

"She is in a scrape of some sort," Clare thought, as she accompanied her uncle to his wife's dressing-room. "What can have happened since he left home? Can it have anything to do with Paul Ward?"

CHAPTER XII.

IN CONFERENCE.

It is nine o'clock in the morning, and breakfast is on the table in the pretty breakfast-room at Poynings. Mrs Carruthers presides over the breakfast-table, and Clare is occupied in arranging some flowers which have just been sent in by the head gardener—sweet, fresh flowers, partaking alike of the brightness of spring and the sweetness of summer, for the April showers have fulfilled their mission, and the earth is alike glowing and redolent. Through the bow-window, opened in fear and trembling by Clare before her uncle's appearance, and hitherto unnoticed by that potentate, who has a vivid dread of rheumatism, comes a soft air laden with delicious scent of new-mown grass; for close underneath three men are busily engaged in trimming the broad lawn, and the sound of their swiftly plied whetstones and the hum of their talk in their occasional intervals of rest has penetrated into the room, and makes a kind of human accompaniment to Mr Carruthers's strictly unhuman and intonative manner of reading the morning prayers. Spreading far away, and bordered in the extreme distance of a sloping shoulder of Surrey down, lies the glorious Kentish landscape, dotted here and there with broad red-faced farmsteads and lowly labourers' cots, with vast expanse of green and springing wheat and hop-grounds, where the parasite has as yet scarcely taken the tall poles within its pliant embrace, with thick plantations and high chalk cuttings, over which the steam from the flying train hangs like a vaporous wreath. In the immediate neighbourhood of the house the big elm-trees, guarding on either side the carriage-drive, tossed their high heads and rustled their broad arms in all the delight of their freshly acquired greenery; dew-bathed broad upland and mossy knoll sparkle alike in the morning sun; in the silvery bosom of the little lake the reflection of the slowly-drifting clouds rears quaint impalpable islands of strange fantastic form; within the magic square of the old red kitchen-garden wall, where rusty nails and fragments of last year's list still hung, large cu-

cumber and melon frames blink in the sunlight, and every little handlight lends a scintillating ray. Over all hangs a sense of stillness and composure, of peace and rest and quietude, such as might bring balm and healing to any wounded spirit.

External influences have, however, very little effect on one of the persons in the breakfast-room, for Mrs Carruthers is bodily ill and mentally depressed. A racking nervous headache has deprived her of sleep during the past night, and has left its traces in deep livid marks underneath her eyes. She has a worn-out look and a preoccupied manner, and while she is superintending the preparation of the Grand Lama's tea—a process about which he is particular, and which is by no means to be lightly undertaken—her thoughts are far away, and her mind is full of doubts and misgiving. Why did her husband come back so suddenly from the agricultural meeting yesterday? Could he by any means have been aware of George's presence in the neighbourhood; and, if so, had he hastened his return with the view of detecting him? If so, he had providentially been thwarted in his plan. Nurse Ellen had seen the boy, and had conveyed to him the bracelet; the means of release from his surrounding difficulties were now in his hands, and the mother felt sure, from his manner, that he would keep his word, and never again subject himself to such a fearful risk. All danger surely must be over; no hint had been dropped by her husband of the slightest suspicion, and yet Mrs Carruthers watches every change of his countenance, listens nervously to every footfall on the stairs, hears with a heart-beat the creak of every opening door, and is, obviously, constrained and wretched and ill at ease.

Clare notices this pityingly and with wonder; Mr Carruthers notices it too, with wonder, but without any pity, but he resents it, in point of fact, silently and with dignity. That Mrs Carruthers of Poynings should "mope" and be "out of sorts" is a kind of reflection on Mr Carruthers of Poynings, which that gentleman by no means approves of. Over the top of his rustling newspaper he looks at his wife with severe glances levelled from under knitted brows; between his occasional bites of toast he gives a short, sharp, irritable cough; now and then he drums with his fingers on the table, or taps his foot impatiently on the floor. No notice of these

vagaries is taken by either of the ladies, it being generally understood at Poynings that the Grand Lama will always find vent in speech when the proper times arrives. Meanwhile, Mrs Carruthers moodily broods over the breakfast equipage, and Clare continues her handiwork with the flowers.

The Grand Lama becomes more and more irate, glares through his gold double eye-glasses at the newspaper, wherein he is reading atrociously "levelling" views promulgated by a correspondent, gives utterance to smothered sounds indicative of indignation and contempt, and is just about to burst forth in a torrent of rage, when the door opens, and a footman, entering, hands a card on a salver to his master. As when, in full pursuit of the flying matorador, the bull in the arena wheels round and engages the lithe picador who has just planted a flag-bearing dart in his quivering carcass, so Mr Carruthers turns upon the servant who had interposed between him and the intended objects of his attack.

"What's this?" said he, in a sharp voice.

"Card, sir," said the footman, utterly unmoved, and with the complacent expression of an ancient gargoyle on a Saxon church.

"Do you think I'm blind?" said his master. "I see it's a card. Where did it come from?"

"Gentleman in the library, sir. Said you was at breakfast; told me no 'urry, and giv' me his card."

Mr Carruthers looks up suspiciously at Thomas footman, but Thomas footman is still gargoylelike. Then Mr Carruthers replaces his eye-glasses, and, looking at the card, reads thereon, in old English characters, "Mr Dalrymple," and in pencil the words "Home Office." "I will be with the gentleman in a moment." Only stopping at the looking-glass to run his fingers through his hair and to settle the tie of his checked cravat, Mr Carruthers creaks out of the room.

Mr Dalrymple, of the Home Office, has established himself in a comfortable chair, from which he rises on Mr Carruthers's entrance. He is a tall, bald-headed man, and, to Mr Carruthers's horror, wears a full-flowing brown beard. The Grand Lama, whose ideas on this point are out of date, knows that beards are now generally worn by members of the aristocracy as well as

foreigners and billiard-sharpers, but cannot conceive that any government has been so preposterously lax as to permit its officials to indulge in such nonsense. Consequently he refers to the card again, and, his first impressions being verified, is dumb with astonishment. Nevertheless, he controls his feelings sufficiently to bow and to point to a chair.

"I am an early visitor, Mr Carruthers," says Mr Dalrymple, "but the fact is, my business is pressing. I came down to Amherst by the mail train last night, but I would not disturb you at so late an hour, and, moreover, I could have done no good by seeing you then; so I slept at the inn. My visit to you is on business, as I presume you understand?"

Mr Dalrymple says this pointedly, as the Grand Lama's face is rapidly assuming an open mouth and sunken jaw expression of idiocy. He recovers himself by an effort, and, glancing at the card, mutters "Home Office."

"Precisely," says Mr Dalrymple. "I am a principal clerk in the Home Office, and I come to you in your capacity as justice of the peace. Lord Wolstenholme, our Secretary, noticed that you generally acted as chairman of the bench of magistrates, and therefore decided that you were the proper person to be communicated with."

Mr Carruthers's attention, which has been wandering a little—his eyes are still attracted by his visitor's beard, and he is wondering how long it has been growing, and why it should be, as it is, of two distinct shades of brown—is recalled by these words, and he mutters that he is obliged to his lordship for his opinion.

"Now, my dear Mr Carruthers," says Mr Dalrymple, bending forward in his chair, dropping his voice to a whisper, and looking slyly from under his bushy eyebrows, "will you allow me to ask you a question? Can you keep a secret?"

Mr Carruthers is taken aback. From his magisterial and country-gentleman position he looks upon secrets as things exclusively appertaining to the vulgar, as connected with conspiracies, plots, swindles, and other indictable offences. Considering, however, that the matter is brought under his notice in connection

with the Home Office, he thinks he may venture to answer in the affirmative, and does accordingly.

"Ex-actly," says Mr Dalrymple. "I knew your answer before I put the question; but in these little matters it is absolutely necessary to have perfect accuracy. Now then to the point—we are quite out of earshot? Thank you! No chance of any one listening at the doors?"

Mr Carruthers says "No," with an expression of face which says he should very much like to catch any one there.

"Pre-cisely! Now, my dear Mr Carruthers, I will at once put you in possession of Lord Wolstenholme's views. The fact is, that a murder has been committed, under rather peculiar circumstances, and his lordship wants your assistance in investigating the matter."

Mr Carruthers is all attention in an instant. Every trace of pre-occupation has vanished. His visitor's beard has no kind of attraction for him now, though it is wagging close before his eyes. A murder! The worst case he had ever investigated was a doubtful manslaughter arising out of a poaching affray, and for his remarks on that he had been highly complimented in the local press; but here is murder—and his aid is enlisted by the Home Office!

"The facts of the case," continues Mr Dalrymple, "are shortly these. A body of a man is seen floating off Paul's Wharf, and is hooked up by one of the men attached to the steam-boat pier there. It is taken to the police station to be examined, and is then found to have been stabbed to the heart with a sharp instrument, and by a strong and clever hand. The pockets are empty, the studs have been taken from the shirt, and there is no token, pocket-book, or anything to establish its identity. 'Ordinary case enough,' you'll say, with your experience; 'ordinary case enough—drunken man decoyed into some water-side ken, robbed, and made away with—case for the police—why Lord Wolstenholme and the Home Office?' You would say that, my dear sir, influenced by your ordinary perspicacity; but I answer your 'Why.' From the appearance of this man's body it is plain that he was not an Englishman; his clothes are not of English cut, and he had on a huge

fur-lined overcoat, with a deep hood, such as no Englishman ever wears. When this description was sent to us, Lord Wolstenholme at once referred to a private correspondence which we have had with the French embassy in relation to some of the Second-of-December exiles who are now sheltered under the British flag, and we came to the conclusion that this was no common murder for purposes of plunder, but an act of political vengeance. Now, my dear sir, you will perceive that to penetrate a mystery of this kind is of the greatest political importance, and consequently his lordship took the matter up at once, and set every engine we have at work to elucidate it. The result of our inquiries proves that the whole chance of identification rests upon a question of coats. The last person by whom, so far as we know, the wearer of the fur-lined coat was seen alive is a waiter at a tavern in the Strand, who distinctly recollects the murdered man, whose dress he described very fully, being particularly positive about his jewelry—diamond studs, real, no ‘duffers,’ as he said, and of which there is no trace to be found—having dined at his eating-house, in company with another man, who had with him a blue Witney overcoat, on the inside of which was a label bearing the name of some tailor, Ewart or Evans, he is unable to state which, residing at Amherst.”

“Good God!” said Mr Carruthers, surprised out of his usual reticence. “Evans—I know the man well!”

“Very likely!” says Mr Dalrymple, composedly. “Evans! The waiter has been had up, cross-questioned, turned inside out, but still adheres to his story. Now, as we imagine this to be a bit of political vengeance, and not an ordinary crime, and as the detectives (capital fellows in their way) have had their heads a little turned since they’ve been made novel heroes of, Lord Wolstenholme thought it better that I should come down into the neighbourhood of Amherst, and with your assistance try to find out where and by whom this coat was bought.”

No hesitation now on Mr Carruthers’s part; he and the Home Office are colleagues in this affair. Lord Wolstenholme has shown his sagacity in picking out the active and intelligent magistrate of the district, and he shall see that his confidence is not misplaced. Will Mr Dalrymple breakfast? Mr Dalrymple has breakfasted;

then a message is sent to Mrs Carruthers to say that Mr Carruthers presumes he *may* say that Mr Dalrymple, a gentleman from London, will join them at dinner? Mr Dalrymple will be delighted, so long as he catches the up mail-train at Amherst at—what is it?—nine fifteen. Mr Carruthers pledges his word that Mr Dalrymple shall be in time, and orders the barouche round at once. Will Mr Dalrymple excuse Mr Carruthers for five minutes? Mr Dalrymple will; and Mr Carruthers goes to his dressing-room, while Mr Dalrymple re-ensconces himself in the big arm-chair, and devotes his period of solitude to paring his nails and whistling softly the while.

The big, heavy, swinging barouche, only used on solemn occasions, such as state visits, Sunday church-goings, and magisterial sittings, drawn by the two big grays, and driven by Gibson, coachman, in his silver wig, his stiff collar, and his bright top-boots, and escorted by Thomas, footman, in all the bloom of blue-and-silver livery and drab gaiters, comes round to the front door, and the gentlemen take their places in it and are driven off. The three gardeners mowing the lawn perform Hindooish obeisances as the carriage passes them; obeisances acknowledged by Mr Carruthers with a fore-finger lifted to the brim of his hat, as modelled on a portrait of the late Duke of Wellington. Bulger at the lodge gates pulls his forelock, and receives the same gracious return, Mr Carruthers all the time bristling with the sense of his own importance, and inwardly wishing that he could tell gardeners, lodge-keeper, and every one they met that his companion had come from the Home Office, and that they were about together to investigate a most important case of murder. Mr Dalrymple, on the contrary, seems to have forgotten all about the actual business under treatment, and might be a friend come on a few days' visit. He admires the scenery, asks about the shooting, gives his opinion on the rising crops, talks of the politics rife in the neighbourhood, showing, by the way, a keen knowledge of their details, and never for an instant refers to the object of their inquiry until they are nearing the town, when he suggests that they had better alight short of their destination, and proceed on foot there. There is no particular reason for this, as probably Mr Dalrymple knows; but

he has never yet pursued an official and mysterious investigation in a barouche, and it seems to him an abnormal proceeding. So Mr Carruthers, deferring in a courtly manner to his visitor's wishes, but, at the same time, walking beside him as though he had him in charge, they alight from the carriage, bidding the servant to wait, and walk into the town, directing their steps towards Evans, tailor.

Evans, tailor, coatless, as is his wont, and with his thumbs stuck in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, is standing at his door, and greets Mr Carruthers with as much bow as is possible to his stout figure. Could they speak to him for a moment? by all manner of means; will Mr Carruthers walk into the back shop? where Miss Evans, a buxom girl with many shaking curls, is discovered working a pair of Berlin-wool slippers, at a glance too small for her father, and is put to flight with much blushing and giggling. The two gentlemen seat themselves in the old-fashioned black-horsehair chairs, and Mr Evans, a little excited, stands by them with his thumbs in his arm-holes, and flaps his hands occasionally, as though they were fins.

"This gentleman, Mr Evans," says Mr Carruthers, giving this happy specimen of his acumen and discretion in a loud and pompous tone—"has come from Lord Wolstenholme, the Secretary of State for the Home Department." Mr Evans gives a fin-flap, indicative of profound respect. "He has been sent here to—"

"Will you permit me in the very mildest manner to interrupt you, my dear sir?" says Mr Dalrymple, in dulcet accents. "You put the matter admirably from the magisterial point of view—but perhaps if I were just to— You have no objection? Thank you! You've lived a long time in Amherst, Mr Evans?"

"I've been a master tailor here, sir, forty-three years last Michaelmas."

"Forty-three years! Long time, indeed! And you're the tailor of the neighbourhood, eh?"

"Well, sir, I think I may say we make for all the gentry round—Mr Carruthers of Poynings, sir, and Sir Thomas Boldero, and—"

"Of course—of course ! You've a gold-printed label, I think, which you generally sew on to all goods made by you ?"

"We have, sir—that same. With my name upon it."

"With your name upon it. Just so ! Now, I suppose that label is never sewed on to anything which has not been either made or sold by you ?"

"Which has not been made, sir ! We don't sell anything except our own make—Evans of Amherst don't."

"Exactly ; and very proper too." To Mr Carruthers : "Settles one point, my dear sir—must have been made here ! Now, Mr Evans, you make all sorts of coats, of course, blue Witney overcoats among the number ?"

Mr Evans, after a hesitating fin-flap, says : "A blue Witney overcoat, sir, is an article seldom if ever called for in these parts. I shouldn't say we'd made one within the last two years—leastways, more than one."

"But you think you did make one ?"

"There were one, sir, made to order from a party that was staying at the Lion."

"Staying at the Lion ? The inn, of course, where I slept last night. How long ago was that ?"

"That were two years ago, sir."

"That won't do !" cries Mr Dalrymple, in disappointed tone.

"Two years ago that it were made and that the party was at the Lion. The coat was sold less than three months ago."

"Was it ? To whom ?"

"To a stranger—a slim young gent who came in here one day promiscuous, and wanted an overcoat. He had that blue Witney, he had !"

"Now, my dear Mr Evans," says Mr Dalrymple, laying his hand lightly on Mr Evans's shirt-sleeve, and looking up from under his bushy brows into the old man's face, "just try and exercise your memory a little about this stranger. Give us a little more description of him—his age, height, general appearance, and that sort of thing !"

But Mr Evans's memory is quite unaccustomed to exercise, and

cannot be jogged, or ensnared, or bullied into any kind of action. The stranger was young, "middling height," appearance, "well, gen-teel and slim-like;" and wild horses could not extract further particulars from Mr Evans than these. Stay. "What did he give for the coat, and in what money did he pay for it?" There's a chance. Mr Evans remembers that he "gev fifty-three-and-six for the overcoat, and handed in a ten-pun' note for change. A ten-pound note, which, as Mr Evans, by a further tremendous effort, recollects, had "the stamp of our post-office on it, as I pinted out to the gent at the time." Was the note there? No; Mr Evans had paid it into the County Bank to his little account with some other money, but he quite recollected the post-office stamp being on it.

Mr Carruthers thinks this a great point, but is dashed by Mr Dalrymple's telling him, on their way from the tailor's, that all bank-notes passing through post-offices received the official stamp. This statement is corroborated at the Amherst post-office, where no money-order of that amount, or of anything equivalent to that amount, has been recently paid, the remittances in that form being, as the postmaster explains, generally to the canal boatmen or the railway people, and of small value.

So there the clue fails suddenly and entirely, and Mr Carruthers and Mr Dalrymple again mount the big swinging barouche and are driven back to Poynings to dinner, which meal is not, however, graced by the presence of either of the ladies; for Mrs Carruthers is too ill to leave her room, and Clare is in attendance on her. So the gentlemen eat a solemn dinner by themselves, and talk a solemn conversation; and at eight o'clock Mr Dalrymple goes away, driven by Gibson, coachman, in the carriage, and turning over in his mind how best to make something out of the uneventful day for the information of the Home Secretary.

That dignitary occupies also much of the attention of Mr Carruthers, left in dignified solitude in the dining-room before the decanters of wine and the dishes of fruit, oblivious of his wife's indisposition, and wholly unobservant of the curiosity with which Mr Downing, his butler and body-servant, surveys him on entering the room to suggest the taking of tea. Very unusual is it for

the Poynings servants to regard their master with curiosity, or indeed with any feeling that bears the semblance of interest ; but, be the cause what it may, there is no mistaking the present expression of Downing's face. Surprise, curiosity, and something which, if it must be called fear, is the pleasant and excited form of that feeling, prompt Mr Downing to look fixedly at his master, who sits back in his chair in an attitude of magisterial cogitation, twirling his heavy gold eye-glass in his bony white hands, and lost in something which resembles thought more closely than Mr Carruthers's mental occupation can ordinarily be said to do. There he sits, until he resolves to take his niece Clare into confidence, tell her of the visit he has received from the gentleman from the Home Office, and ask her whether she can make anything of it, which resolution attained, and finding by his watch that the hour is half-past ten, and that therefore a Carruthers of Poynings may retire to rest if he chooses without indecorum, the worthy gentleman creaks up-stairs to his room, and in a few minutes is sleeping the sleep of the just. Mrs Carruthers—Clare having been some time previously dismissed from the room—also seems to sleep soundly ; at least her husband has seen that her eyes are closed.

Her rest, real or pretended, would have been none the calmer had she been able to see her faithful old servant pacing up and down the housekeeper's room, and wringing her withered hands in an agony of distress ; for the servant who had gone to Amherst with Mr Carruthers and his mysterious visitor in the morning had learned the meaning and purpose of the two gentlemen's visit to Evans, the tailor, and had made it the subject of a lively and sentimental conversation in the servants' hall. Although literature was not in a very flourishing condition at Amherst, the male domestics of the household at Poynings were not without their sources of information, and had thoroughly possessed themselves of the details of the murder.

Mrs Brookes had heard of the occurrence two or three times in the course of the preceding day, but she had given it little attention. She was in her own room when the servants returned with the carriage which had taken Mr Dalrymple to the railway station, having visited her mistress for the last time that evening, and was

thinking, sadly enough, of George, when the entrance of the upper housemaid, her eager face brimful of news, disturbed her.

"Oh, Mrs Brookes," she began, "do you know who that gentleman was as dined here, and went to the town with master?"

"No, I don't," said Mrs Brookes, with some curiosity; "do you?"

"Not exactly; but Thomas says Home Office were wrote on his card, and Home Office has something to do with finding people out when they've been a-doing anything."

Mrs Brookes began to feel uncomfortable.

"What do you mean?" she said. "Who's been doing anything that wants finding out?"

"Nobody as I knows," replied Martha, looking knowing and mysterious. "Only, you know, that murder as Mr Downing read us the inquest of, and how it's a foreigner as has been killed because he wouldn't help to blow up the King of France; at least, there's something of that in it. Well, Mr Downing thinks as the gentleman come about that."

"About that, *here*?" said Mrs Brookes. "Whatever has put such a notion into Mr Downing's head as that?"

"Well, Mrs Brookes, this is it: they're all talking about it in the hall, and so I thought I'd just come and tell you. Master and the stranger gentleman didn't take the carriage right on into town; they got just inside the pike, and went on by themselves; and, when they came back, master he looked very red and grand-looking, and the strange gentleman he looked as if he was rare disappointed and put out, and, as he was a-shutting the door of the brouche, Thomas heard him saying, 'No, no; there's nothing more to be done. Evans was our only chance, and he's no use.' So nat'rally Thomas wonders whatever they've been about, and what was their business with Evans; so he and coachman wasn't sorry this evening when the strange gentleman was gone by the train, and they see Evans a-loungin' about, a-flapping his hands, which he's always doing of it, up by the station. He were ldokin' at the strange gentleman as sharp as sharp, as they drove up to the bookin'-office; and when they came out, there he were, and Evans tells 'em all about it."

"All about *what*?" asks Mrs Brookes sharply.

"All about what brought master and the other gentleman to his shop; and it's his belief, as master said more than the other gentleman wanted him to say; for master let out as how a murder had something to do with the business."

"What business, Martha? Do tell me what you mean, if you want me to listen to you any longer. How could Mr Carruthers want to know anything from Evans about a murder?"

"Lor', ma'am, it weren't about the murder; it were about the coat! Master told Evans as how there had been a murder, and the other gentleman took master up rather shorter, Evans thinks, than master is accustomed to be took, and asked him no end of questions—did he make such and such coats? and who did he sell 'em to? and partic'lar did he sell Witney coats? which Mr Evans said he didn't in general, and had only sold one in two years, which the strange gentleman wanted to know what sort of gent had had it, and were he young or old, or good-looking or or'nary, and a mort of questions; wherein Evans answered him to the best of his ability, but, being a man of his word, he couldn't make it no clearer than he could."

"What *did* he make clear?" asked Mrs Brookes. "Two years is a long time to remember the sale of a coat."

"It wasn't so long since it were sold. Mr Evans sold it six weeks ago, but it were two years made."

Mrs Brookes's heart gave a great bound, and her old eyes grew dim; but she was a brave woman, and Martha, housemaid, was a dull one.

"Did Mr Evans not succeed in describing the person who bought the coat, then?"

"He thinks not; but he says he should know him again immediate, if he saw him. The strange gentleman didn't seem over-pleased that his memory was so short; but lor', who's to know all about the eyeses and the noses of everybody as comes to buy a coat, or what not?—partic'lar if you don't know as he's been a committen of a murder. If you did, why, you'd look at him closer like, I should say!"

"Has Mr Downing got the paper with the murder of the foreigner in it?" asked Mrs Brookes.

"Yes, he have; he's just been reading it all over again in the hall. And he says as how master's in a brown study, as he calls it; only it's in the dining-room, and he's sure as the finding-out people has put it into his hands."

"When he has done with the paper, ask him to let me see it, Martha. Very likely this stranger's visit has nothing to do with the matter. Downing finds out things that nobody else can see."

Martha was an admirer and partisan of Mr Downing, from the humble and discreet distance which divides a housemaid from a butler, and she did not like to hear his discretion aspersed.

"It looks as if he was right this time, however," she replied; "though it wasn't Tim the tinker as stole Sir Thomas's spoons, which Mr Downing never had a good opinion of him; but when there ain't nothing clearer than the person who was seen at the eating-house with the victim" (Martha "took in" the *Hatchet of Horror* every week, and framed her language on that delightful model) "had on a coat as Evans made, it looks as if he wasn't altogether in the wrong, now don't it, Mrs Brookes?"

Mrs Brookes could not deny that it looked very like that complimentary conclusion, and her brave old heart almost died within her. But she kept down her fear and horror, and dismissed Martha, telling her to bring her the paper as soon as she could. The woman returned in a few moments, laid the newspaper beside Mrs Brookes, and then went off to enjoy a continuation of the gossip of the servants' hall. Very exciting and delightful that gossip was, for though the servants had no inkling of the terribly strong interest, the awfully near connection, which existed for Poynings in the matter, it was still a great privilege to be "in" so important an affair by even the slender link formed by the probable purchase of a coat at Amherst by the murderer. They enjoyed it mightily; they discussed it over and over again, assigning to the murdered man every grade of rank short of royalty, and all the virtues possible to human nature. The women were particularly eloquent and sympathizing, and Martha "quite cried," as she speculated on the great probability of there being a broken-hearted sweetheart in the case.

In the housekeeper's room, Mrs Brookes sat poring over the

terrible story, to which she had listened carelessly on the previous day, as the servants talked it vaguely over. From the first words Martha had spoken, her fears had arisen, and now they were growing every instant to the terrible certainty of conviction. What if the wretched young man, who had already been the cause of so much misery, had added this fearful crime to the long catalogue of his follies and sins?

All the household sleeps, and the silence of the night is in every room but one. There Mrs Brookes still sits by the table with the newspaper spread before her, lost in a labyrinth of fear and anguish; and from time to time her grief finds words, such as:

"How shall I tell her? How shall I warn her? O George, George! O my boy! my boy!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

MR CARRUTHERS was an early man; no danger of any skulking among the numerous hands which found employment on the Poynings estate. If the eye of the master be indeed the spur of the servant, Mr Carruthers's dependents had quite enough of that stimulant. He made his rounds every morning at an hour which the in-door servants, who were obliged to have breakfast ready on his return, considered heathenish, and the out-door servants declared savoured of slave-driving. Mrs Brookes knew that she should have no difficulty in procuring a private interview with her mistress on the morning following Mr Dalrymple's visit, as an hour and a half always elapsed between Mr Carruthers's leaving the house and his wife's ringing for her maid. The old woman looked worn and weary and very old, as she peered from behind a red-cloth door, which shut off the corridor on which Mr Carruthers's dressing-room opened from the grand gallery, and watched her master take his creaking way down the staircase, looking as he

went more full of self-importance than usual, and treading more heavily, as if the weight of the Home Office communication had got into his boots.

When he had disappeared, and she had heard the click of the lock as he opened the great door and went out into the pure fresh morning air, Mrs Brookes emerged from behind the partition-door, and softly took the way to Mrs Carruthers's bedroom. The outer door was slightly open, the heavy silken curtain within hung closely over the aperture. The old woman pushed it gently aside, and, noiselessly crossing the room, drew the window curtain, and let in sufficient light to allow her to see that Mrs Carruthers was still sleeping. Her face, pale, and even in repose bearing a, troubled expression, was turned towards the old woman, who seated herself in an arm-chair beside the bed, and looked silently and sadly on the features, whose richest bloom and earliest sign of fading she had so faithfully watched.

"How am I to tell her?" she thought. "How am I to make her see what I see, suspect what I suspect? and yet she must know all, for the least imprudence, a moment's forgetfulness, would ruin him. How am I to tell her?"

The silver bell of a little French clock on the chimney-piece rang out the hour melodiously, but its warning struck upon the old woman's ear menacingly. There was much to do, and little time to do it in; she must not hesitate longer. So she laid her withered, blanched old hand upon the polished, ivory-white fingers of the sleeper, lying with the purposelessness of deep sleep upon the coverlet, and addressed her as she had been used to do in her girlhood, and her early desolate widowhood, when her humble friend had been well-nigh her only one.

"My dear," she said, "my dear." Mrs Carruthers's hand twitched in her light grasp; she turned her head away with a troubled sigh, but yet did not wake. The old woman spoke again: "My dear, I have something to say to you."

Then Mrs Carruthers awoke fully, and to an instantaneous comprehension that something was wrong. All her fears, all her suspicions of the day before, returned to her mind in one flash of apprehension, and she sat up white and breathless.

"What is it, Ellen? Has he found out? Does he know?"

"Who? What do you mean?"

"Mr Carruthers. Does he know George was here?"

"God forbid!" said the old woman, in a trembling tone.

She felt the task she had before her almost beyond her power of execution. But her mistress's question, her instinctive fear, had given her a little help.

"No," she said, "he knows nothing, and God send he may neither know nor suspect anything about our dear boy! but you must be quiet now and listen to me, for I must have said my say before Dixon comes—she must not find me here."

"Why are you here?" asked Mrs Carruthers, who had sat up in bed, and was now looking at the old woman, with a face which had no more trace of colour than the pillow from which it had just been raised. "Tell me, Ellen; do not keep me in suspense. Is anything wrong about George? It must concern *him*, whatever it is."

"My dear," began Mrs Brookes—and now she held the slender fingers tightly in her withered palm—"I fear there is something very wrong with George."

"Is he—is he dead?" asked the mother, in a faint voice.

"No, no; he is well and safe, and far away from this, I hope and trust."

Mrs Carruthers made no answer, but she gazed at her old friend with irresistible, pitiful entreaty. Mrs Brookes answered the dumb appeal.

"Yes, my dear, I'll tell you all. I must, for his sake. Do you know what was the business that brought that strange gentleman here, he that went out with master, and dined here last night? No, you don't. I thought not. Thank God, you have got no hint of it from any one but me."

"Go on, go on," said Mrs Carruthers, in a yet fainter voice.

"Do you remember, when George was here in February, you gave him money to buy a coat?"

"Yes," Mrs Carruthers rather sighed than said.

"He bought one at Evans's, and he was remarked by the old man, who would know him again if he saw him. The business on

which the strange gentleman came to master was to get him to help, as a magistrate, in finding the person who bought that coat at Evans's, Amherst."

"But why? What had he done? How was the coat known?"

"My dear," said Mrs Brookes—and now she laid one arm gently round her mistress's shoulder as she leaned against the pillows—"the wearer of that coat is suspected of having murdered a man, whose body was found by the river-side in London the other day."

"My God!" moaned the mother, and a hue as of death overspread her features.

"My dear, he didn't do it. I'm sure he didn't do it. I would stake my soul upon it. It is some dreadful mistake. Keep up until I have done, for God's sake, and George's sake, keep up—remember there is no danger unless you lose courage and give them a hint of anything. Be sure we shall find he has sold the coat to some one else, and that some one has done this dreadful thing. But you must keep up—here, let me bathe your face and hands while I am talking, and then I'll go away, and, when Dixon comes, you must just say you are not well, and don't mean to get up to breakfast, and then I shall have an excuse for coming to you. There! you are better now, I am sure. Yes, yes; don't try to speak; I'll tell you without asking," she went on, in a rapid whisper. "The strange gentleman and master saw Evans, and he told them when he sold the coat, and the sort of person he sold it to; but Gibson and Thomas say he could not have told them distinct, for they heard the strange gentleman saying to master, in the carriage, that the description was of no use. And I am certain sure that there is not the least suspicion that he has ever been in Amherst since he bought the coat."

"I don't understand," stammered Mrs Carruthers. "When—when did this happen?"

"A few days ago: it's all in the papers."

Mrs Carruthers groaned.

"Nothing about George, but about finding the body and the coat. It is all here." The old woman took a tightly folded newspaper from her pocket. The light was too dim for her to read its

contents to her mistress, who was wholly incapable of reading them herself. Mrs Brookes, paper in hand, was going to the window, to withdraw the curtain completely, when she paused.

"No," she said; "Dixon will be here too soon. Better that you should ring for her at once, and send her for me. Can you do this, my dear? keeping yourself up by remembering that this is only some dreadful mistake, and that George never did it—no, no more than you did. Can you let me go away for a few minutes, and then come back to you? Remember, we cannot be too careful, for his sake; and if Dixon found me here at an unusual hour, the servants would know there is some secret or another between us."

"I can bear anything—I can do anything you tell me," was Mrs Carruthers's answer, in a whisper.

"Well then, first lie down, and I will close the curtains and leave you. When I have had time to get to my room, ring for Dixon. Tell her you are ill. When she lets the light in she will see that for herself, and desire her to send me to you."

In another minute the room was once more in darkness, and Mrs Brookes went down the grand staircase, in order to avoid meeting any of the servants, crossed the hall, and gained her own apartment without being observed. A short time, but long to her impatience, had elapsed, when Mrs Carruthers's maid knocked at the door, and having received permission to enter, came in with an important face. She delivered the message which Mrs Brookes was expecting, and added that she had never seen her lady look so ill in all her born days.

"Looks more like a corpse, I do assure you, than like the lady I undressed last night, and circles under her eyes, dreadful. I only hope it ain't typhus, for I'm dreadful nervous, not being used to sickness, which indeed I never engaged for. But, if you please, Mrs Brookes, you was to go to her immediate, and I'm to let Miss Carruthers know as she's to make tea this morning for master, all to their two selves, which he won't like it, I dare say."

Then the talkative damsel went her way to Miss Carruthers's room, and Mrs Brookes hurried to that of her unhappy mistress. She had again raised herself in the bed, and was looking eagerly towards

the door, with hollow haggard eyes, and lips ashy pale, whose trembling she in vain tried to control.

"Lock both doors, Ellen," she said, "and tell me all. Give me the paper; I can read it—I can indeed."

She took it and read it steadily through—read it with the same horrible emotion, a thousand times intensified, which had agitated the faithful servant a few hours previously. Standing by the bedside, Mrs Brookes gazed upon her pale, convulsed features, as she read, and ever, as she saw the increasing agony which they betrayed, she murmured in accents of earnest entreaty:

"Don't, my dear, for God's sake, don't, not for a moment, don't you believe it. He sold the coat, depend upon it. It looks very bad, very black and bad, but you may be sure there's no truth in it. He sold the coat."

She spoke to deaf ears. When Mrs Carruthers had read the last line of the account of the inquest on the body of the unknown man, the paper dropped from her hand; she turned upon the old nurse a face which, from that moment, she never had the power to forget, and said:

"He wore it—I saw it on him on Friday," and the next moment slipped down among the pillows, and lay as insensible as a stone.

The old woman gave no alarm, called for no assistance, but silently and steadily applied herself to recalling Mrs Carruthers to consciousness. She had no fear of interruption. Mr Carruthers invariably went direct to the breakfast-room on returning from his morning tour of inspection, and Clare would not visit Mrs Carruthers in her own apartment unasked. So Mrs Brookes set the windows and doors wide open, and let the sweet morning air fan the insensible face, while she applied all the remedies at hand. At length Mrs Carruthers sighed deeply, opened her eyes, and raised her hand to her forehead, where it came in contact with the wet hair.

"Hush, my dear," said Mrs Brookes, as she made an almost inarticulate attempt to speak. "Do not try to say anything yet. Lie quite still, until you are better."

Mrs Carruthers closed her eyes again and kept silent. When,

after an interval, she began to look more life-like, the old woman said, softly :

"You must not give way again like this, for George's sake. I don't care about his wearing the coat. I know it looks bad, but it is a mistake, I am quite sure. Don't I know the boy as well as you do, and maybe better, and don't I know his tender heart, with all his wildness, and that he never shed a fellow-creature's blood in anger, or for any other reason. But it's plain he is suspected—not he, for they don't know him, thank God, but the man that wore the coat, and we must warn him, and keep it from master. Master would go mad, I think, if anything like suspicion or disgrace came of Master George, more than the disgrace he thinks the poor boy's goings on already. You must keep steady and composed, my dear, and you must write to him. Are you listening to me? Do you understand me?" asked the old woman, anxiously, for Mrs Carruthers's eyes were wild and wandering, and her hand twitched convulsively in her grasp.

"Yes, yes," she murmured, "but I tell you, Ellen, he wore the coat—my boy wore the coat."

"And I tell you, I don't care whether he wore the coat or not," repeated Mrs Brookes, emphatically. "He can explain that, no doubt of it; but he must be kept out of trouble, and you must be kept out of trouble, and the only way to do that, is to let him know what brought the strange gentleman to Poynings, and what he and master found out. Remember, he never did this thing, but, my dear, he has been in bad hands lately, you know that; for haven't you suffered in getting him out of them, and I don't say but that he may be mixed up with them that did. I'm afraid there can't be any doubt of that, and he must be warned. Try and think of what he told you about himself, not only just now, but when he came here before, and you will see some light, I am sure."

But Mrs Carruthers could not think of anything, could not remember anything, could see no light. A deadly horrible conviction had seized upon her, iron fingers clutched her heart, a faint sickening terror held her captive, in body and spirit; and as the old woman gazed at her, and found her incapable of answering,

the fear that her mistress was dying then and there before her eyes took possession of her. She folded up the newspaper which had fallen from Mrs Carruthers's hand upon the bed, replaced it in her pocket, and rang the bell for Dixon.

"My mistress is very ill," she said, when Dixon entered the room. "You had better go and find master, and send him here. Tell him to send Dr Munns at once."

Dixon gave a frightened, sympathizing glance at the figure on the bed, over which the old woman was bending with such kindly solicitude, and then departed on her errand. She found Mr Carruthers still in the breakfast-room. He was seated at the table, and held in his hand a newspaper, from which he had evidently been reading, when Dixon knocked at the door; for he was holding it slightly aside, and poising his gold eye-glass in the other hand, when the woman entered. Mr Carruthers was unaccustomed to being disturbed, and he did not like it, so that it was in a tone of some impatience that he said:

"Well, Dixon, what do you want?"

"If you please, sir," replied Dixon hesitatingly, "my mistress is not well."

"So I hear," returned her master; "she sent word she did not mean to appear at breakfast. He said it rather huffily, for not to appear at breakfast was, in Mr Carruthers's eyes, not to have a well-regulated mind, and not to have a well-regulated mind was very lamentable and shocking indeed.

"Yes, sir," Dixon went on, "but I'm afraid she's very ill indeed. She has been fainting this long time, sir, and Mrs Brookes can't bring her to at all. She sent me to ask you to send for Dr Munns at once, and will you have the goodness to step up and see my mistress, sir?"

"God bless my soul," said Mr Carruthers, pettishly, but rising as he spoke, and pushing his chair away. "This is very strange; she has been exposing herself to cold, I suppose. Yes, yes, go on and tell Mrs Brookes I am coming, as soon as I send Gibson for Dr Munns."

Dixon left the room, and Mr Carruthers rang the bell, and desired that the coachman should attend him immediately. When

Dixon had entered the breakfast-room, Clare Carruthers had been standing by the window, looking out on the garden, her back turned towards her uncle. She had not looked round once during the colloquy between her uncle and his wife's maid, but had remained quite motionless. Now Mr Carruthers addressed her.

"Clare," he said, "you had better go to Mrs Carruthers." But his niece was no longer in the room; she had softly opened the French window, and passed into the flower-garden, carrying among the sweet, opening flowers of the early summer, and into the serene air, a face which might have vied in its rigid terror with the face up-stairs. When Mr Carruthers had come in that morning, and joined Clare in the pretty breakfast-room, he was in an unusually pleasant mood, and had greeted his niece with uncommon kindness. He had found everything in good order out of doors. No advantage had been taken of his absence to neglect the inexorable sweepings and rollings, the clippings and trimmings, the gardening and grooming. So Mr Carruthers was in good humour in consequence, and also because he was still nourishing the secret sense of his own importance, which had sprung up in his magisterial breast under the flattering influence of Mr Dalrymple's visit. So when he saw Clare seated before the breakfast equipage, looking in her simple, pretty morning dress as fair and bright as the morning itself, and when he received an intimation that he was not to expect to see his wife at breakfast, he recalled the resolution he had made last night, and determined to broach the subject of Mr Dalrymple's visit to his niece without delay.

A pile of letters and newspapers lay on a salver beside Mr Carruthers's plate, but he did not attend to them until he had made a very respectable beginning in the way of breakfast. He talked to Clare in a pleasant tone, and presently asked her if she had been looking at the London papers during the last few days. Clare replied that she seldom read anything beyond the deaths, births, and marriages, and an occasional leader, and had not read even so much while she had been at the Sycamores.

"Why do you ask, uncle?" she said. "Is there any particular news?"

"Why, yes, there is," replied Mr Carruthers, pompously.

"There is a matter attracting public attention just now in which I am, strange to say, a good deal interested—in which responsibility has been laid on me, indeed, in a way which, though flattering—very flattering indeed—is, at the same time, embarrassing."

Mr Carruthers became more and more pompous with every word he spoke. Clare could not repress a disrespectful notion that he bore an absurd resemblance to the turkey-cock, whose struttings and gobblings had often amused her in the poultry-yard, as he mouthed his words and moved his chin about in his stiff and spotless cravat. His niece was rather surprised by the matter of his discourse, as she was not accustomed to associate the idea of importance to society at large with Mr Carruthers of Poynings, and cherished a rather settled conviction that, mighty potentate as he was within the handsome gates of Poynings, the world outside wagged very independently of him. She looked up at him with an expression of interest and also of surprise, but fortunately she did not give utterance to the latter and certainly predominant sentiment.

"The fact is," said Mr Carruthers, "a murder has been committed in London under very peculiar circumstances. It is a most mysterious affair, and the only solution of the mystery hitherto suggested is that the motive is political."

He paused, cleared his throat, once more settled his chin comfortably, and went on while Clare listened, wondering more and more how such a matter could affect her uncle. She was a gentle-hearted girl; but not in the least silly, and quite free from any sort of affectation; so she expressed no horror or emotion at the mere abstract idea of the murder, as a more young-ladyish young lady would have done.

"Yes, uncle?" she said, simply, as he paused.

Mr Carruthers continued:

"The murdered man was found by the river-side, stabbed, and robbed of whatever money and jewelry he had possessed. He was a good-looking man, young, and evidently a foreigner; but there were no means of identifying the body, and the inquest was adjourned—in fact, is still adjourned."

"What an awful death to come by, in a strange country!" said

Clare, solemnly. "How dreadful to think that his friends and relatives will perhaps never know his fate! But how did they know the poor creature was a foreigner, uncle?"

"By his dress, my dear. It appears he had on a fur-lined coat, with a hood—quite a foreign article of dress; and the only person at the inquest able to throw any light on the crime was a waiter at an eating-house in the Strand, who said that the murdered man had dined there on a certain evening—last Thursday, I believe—and had worn the fur coat, and spoken in a peculiar squeaky voice. The waiter felt sure he was not an Englishman, though he spoke good English. So the inquest was adjourned in order to get more evidence, if possible, as to the identity of the murdered man and also that of the last person who had been seen in his company. And this brings me to the matter in which I am interested."

Clare watched her uncle with astonishment as he rose from his chair and planted himself upon the hearth-rug before the fireplace, now adorned with its summer ornaments of plants and flowers, and draped in muslin. Taking up the familiar British attitude, and looking, if possible, more than ever pompous, Mr Carruthers proceeded:

"You will be surprised to learn, Clare, that the visit of the gentleman who came here yesterday, and with whom I went out, had reference to this murder."

"How, uncle?" exclaimed Clare. "What on earth have you, or has any one here, to do with it?"

"Wait until I have done, and you will see," said Mr Carruthers in a tone of stately rebuke. "The last person seen in the company of the man afterwards found murdered, and who dined with him at the tavern, wore a coat which the waiter who recognized the body had chanced to notice particularly. The appearance of this person the man failed in describing with much distinctness; but he was quite positive about the coat, which he had taken from the man and hung up on a peg with his own hands. And now, Clare, I am coming to the strangest part of this strange story."

The girl listened with interest indeed, and with attention, but still wondering how her uncle could be involved in the matter,

and perhaps feeling a little impatient at the slowness with which, in his self-importance, he told the story.

"I was much surprised," continued Mr Carruthers, "to find in the gentleman who came here yesterday, and whose name was Dalrymple, an emissary from the Home Office, intrusted by Lord Wolstenholme with a special mission to me"—impossible to describe the pomposity of Mr Carruthers's expression and utterance at this point—"to me. He came to request me to assist him in investigating this most intricate and important case. It is not a mere police case, you must understand, my dear. The probability is that the murdered man is a political refugee, and that the crime has been perpetrated"—Mr Carruthers brought out the word with indescribable relish—"by a member of one of the secret societies, in revenge for the defection of the victim, or in apprehension of his betrayal of the cause."

"What cause, uncle?" asked Clare innocently. She was not of a sensational turn of mind, had no fancy for horrors as horrors, and was getting a little tired of her uncle's story.

"God knows, my dear—some of their liberty, fraternity, and equality nonsense, I suppose. At all events, this is the supposition; and to ask my aid in investigating the only clue in the possession of the government was the object of Mr Dalrymple's visit yesterday. The man who was seen in the company of the murdered man by the waiter at the tavern, and who went away with him, wore a coat made by Evans of Amherst. You know him, Clare—the old man who does so much of our work here. I went to his shop with Mr Dalrymple, and we found out all about the coat. He remembered it exactly, by the description; and told us when he had made it (two years ago), and when he had sold it (six weeks ago), to a person who paid for it with a ten-pound note with the Post-office stamp upon it. The old man is not very bright, however; for though he remembered the circumstance, and found the date in his day-book, he could not give anything like a clear description of the man who had bought the coat. He could only tell us, in general terms, that he would certainly know him again if he should see him; but he talked about a rather tall young man, neither stout nor thin, neither ugly nor handsome, dark-eyed and dark-

haired,—in short, the kind of description which describes nothing. We came away as wise as we went, except in the matter of the date of the purchase of the coat. That does not help much towards the detection of the murderer, as a coat may change hands many times in six weeks, if it has been originally bought by a dubious person. The thing would have been to establish a likeness between the man described by Evans as the purchaser of the coat, and the man described by the waiter as the wearer of the coat at the tavern. But both descriptions are very vague."

"What was the coat like?" asked Clare in a strange, deliberate tone.

"It was a blue Witney overcoat, with a label inside the collar bearing Evans's name. The waiter at the tavern where the murdered man dined had read the name, and remembered it. This led to their sending to me; and my being known to the authorities as a very active magistrate"—here Mr Carruthers swelled and pouted with importance—"they naturally communicated with me. The question is now, how I am to justify the very flattering confidence which Lord Wolstenholme has placed in me? It is a difficult question, and I have been considering it maturely. Mr Dalrymple seems to think the clue quite lost. But I am not disposed to let it rest; I am determined to set every possible engine at work to discover whether the description given by the waiter and that given by Evans tally with one another."

"You said the inquest was adjourned, I think," said Clare.

"Yes, until to-day; but Mr Dalrymple will not have learned anything. There will be an open verdict"—here Mr Carruthers condescendingly explained to his niece the meaning of the term—"and the affair will be left to be unravelled in time. I am anxious to do all I can towards that end; it is a duty I owe to society, to Lord Wolstenholme, and to myself."

Clare had risen from her chair, and approached the window. Her uncle could not see her face, as he resumed his seat at the breakfast-table, and opened his letters in his usual deliberate and dignified manner. Being letters addressed to Mr Carruthers of Poynings, they were, of course, important; but if they had not had that paramount claim to consideration, the communication in

question might have been deemed dull and trivial. Whatever their nature, Clare Carruthers turned her head from the window, and furtively watched her uncle during their perusal. He read them with uplifted eyebrows and much use of his gold-rimmed eye-glasses, as his habit was, but then laid them down without comment, and took up a newspaper.

"I dare say we shall find something about the business in this," he said, addressing his niece, but without turning his head in her direction. "Ah, I thought so; here it is: 'Mysterious circumstance; extraordinary supineness and stupidity of the police; no one arrested on suspicion; better arrest the wrong man, and tranquillize the public mind, than arrest no one at all.' I'm not convinced by that reasoning, I must say. What!—no reason for regarding the murder as a political assassination? Listen to this, Clare;" and he read aloud, while she stood by the window, her back turned towards him, and listened intently, greedily, with a terrible fear and sickness at her heart:

"The supposition that this atrocious crime has been committed from political motives has, in our opinion, no foundation in probability, and derives very little support from common sense. The appearance of the body, the fineness of the linen, the expensive quality of the attire, the torn condition of the breast and sleeves of the shirt, which seems plainly to indicate that studs, probably of value, had been wrenched violently out; the extreme improbability that an individual, so handsomely dressed as the murdered man, would have been out without money in his pocket,—all indicate robbery, at least; and if perhaps more than robbery, certainly not less, to have been the motive of the crime. An absurd theory has been founded upon the peculiarity in the dress of the victim, and upon the remark made by the only witness at the inquest about his tone of voice. Nothing is more likely, in our opinion, than a complete miscarriage of justice in this atrocious case. Suspicion has been arbitrarily directed in one channel, and the result will be, probably, the total neglect of other and more likely ones. While the political murderer is being theorized about and "wanted," the more ordinary criminal—the ruffian who kills for gain, and not for patriotism or principle—is as likely as not to escape comfortably,

and enjoy his swag in some pleasant, unsuspected, and undisturbed retreat.'

"Now, I call this most unjustifiable," said Mr Carruthers in a tone of dignified remonstrance and indignation. "Really, the liberty of the press is going quite too far. The Government are convinced that the murder *is* political, and I can't see—"

It was at this point of Mr Carruthers's harangue that he was interrupted by his wife's maid. When he again looked for Clare she had disappeared, nor did he or any of the frightened and agitated household at Poynings see the young lady again for many hours. Dr Munns arrived, and found Mr Carruthers considerably distressed at the condition in which Mrs Carruthers was, also a little annoyed at that lady's want of consideration in being ill, and unable to refrain from hinting, with much reserve and dignity of manner, that he was at present more than usually engaged in business of the last importance, which rendered it peculiarly unfortunate that he should have an additional care imposed on him—public importance, he took care to explain, and no less onerous than mysterious. But the worthy gentleman's pride and pompousness were soon snubbed by the extreme gravity of Dr Munns's manner, as he answered his inquiries and put questions in his turn relative to his patient. The doctor was both alarmed and puzzled by Mrs Carruthers's state. He told her husband she was very seriously ill: he feared brain-fever had already set in. Could Mr Carruthers account for the seizure in any way? No, Mr Carruthers could not; neither could the housekeeper, nor Mrs Carruthers's maid, both of whom were closely questioned, as having more and more frequent access to that lady's presence than any other members of the household.

Had Mrs Carruthers heard any distressing intelligence? had she received a shock of any kind? the doctor inquired. Mr Carruthers appeared to sustain one from the question. Of course not; certainly not; nothing of the kind, he replied, with some unexpressed irritation of manner, and secretly regarded the bare suggestion of such a possibility as almost indecent. Mrs Carruthers of Poynings receive shocks indeed! The doctor, who knew and disregarded his peculiarities, calmly pursued his inquiries un-

deterred by Mr Carruthers's demeanour ; and finding that nothing particular had happened, acknowledged that, there being no apparent cause to which so sudden and serious an illness could be attributed, he was the more uneasy as to its probable result. Then Mr Carruthers caught the infection of his alarm, and all the best side of his character, all the real love and appreciation of his wife, ordinarily overlaid by his egotism, came out in full force, and the staunchest stickler for domestic fealty could not have demanded greater solicitude than the frightened husband exhibited.

In a wonderfully short of space of time the house assumed the appearance which illness always gives. The servants went about their work whispering, and the sitting-rooms were silent and deserted. No one bestowed a thought on Clare. The attendants on the suffering woman, busily engaged in carrying out the orders given them by Dr Munns, who remained for several hours with his patient ; the alarmed husband, who wandered about disconsolately between his own library and his wife's room—all forgot the girl's existence. It was very late—within a few minutes of the usual dinner-hour (an inflexible period at Poynings)—when Clare Carruthers crossed the flower-garden, entered the house by the window through which she had left it, and stole gently up-stairs to her own room. She threw her hat and shawl upon her bed and went to her dressing-table. There she stood for some minutes before the glass, holding her disordered hair back with her hands—there were bits of grass and fragments of leaves in it, as though she had been lying with her fair head prone upon the ground—and gazing upon her young misery-stricken face. White about the full pure lips, where the rich blood ordinarily glowed ; purple about the long fair eyelids and the blushing cheeks, heavy-eyed,—the girl was piteous to see, and she knew it. The hours that had passed over since she left her uncle's presence in the morning had been laden with horror, with dread, with such anguish as had never in its lightest form touched her young spirit before ; and she trembled as she marked the ravages they had made in her face.

"What shall I do?" she murmured, as though questioning her own forlorn image in the glass. "What shall I do? I dare not

stay away from dinner, and what will they say when they see my face?"

She fastened up her hair, and bathed her face with cold water; then returned to the glass to look at it again; but the pallor was still upon the lips, the discoloration was still about the heavy eyelids. As she stood despairingly before the dressing-table, her maid came to her.

"The dinner-bell will not ring, ma'am," said the girl. "Mr Carruthers is afraid of the noise for Mrs Carruthers."

"Ay," said Clare, listlessly, still looking at the disfigured image in the glass. "How is she?"

"No better, ma'am; very bad indeed, I believe. But don't take on so, Miss Clare," her maid went on, affectionately. "She is not so bad as they say, perhaps; and, at all events, you'll knock yourself up, and be no comfort to Mr Carruthers."

A light flashed upon Clare. She had only to keep silence, and no one would find her out; her tears, her anguish, would be imputed to her share of the family trouble. Her maid, who would naturally have noticed her appearance immediately, expressed no surprise. Mrs Carruthers was very ill, then. Something new had occurred since the morning, when there had been no hint of anything serious in her indisposition. The maid evidently believed her mistress acquainted with all that had occurred. She had only to keep quiet, and nothing would betray her ignorance. So she allowed the girl to talk, while she made some trifling change in her dress, and soon learned all the particulars of Mrs Carruthers's illness, and the doctor's visit, of her uncle's alarm, and Mrs Brookes's devoted attendance on her mistress. Then Clare, trembling though relieved of her immediate apprehension of discovery, went down-stairs to join her uncle at their dreary dinner. He made no comment upon the girl's appearance, and, indeed, hardly spoke. The few words of sympathy which Clare ventured to say were briefly answered, and as soon as possible he left the dining-room. Clare sat by the table for a while, with her face buried in her hands, thinking, suffering, but not weeping. She had no more tears to-day to shed.

Presently she went to Mrs Carruthers's room, and sat down on

a chair behind the door, abstracted and silent. In the large dimly-lighted room she was hardly seen by the watchers. She saw her uncle come in, and stand forlornly by the bed ; then the doctor came, and several figures moved about silently and went away, and then there was no one but Mrs Brookes sitting still as a statue beside the sufferer, who lay in a state of stupor. How long she had been in the room before the old woman perceived her Clare did not know ; but she felt Mrs Brookes bending over her, and taking her hand, before she knew she had moved from the bedside.

"Pray go away and lie down, Miss Carruthers," the old woman said, half tenderly, half severely. "You can do no good here—no one can do any good here yet—and you will be ill yourself. We can't do with more trouble in the house, and crying your eyes out of your head, as you've been doing, won't help any one, my dear. I will send you word how she is the first thing in the morning."

The old woman raised the girl by a gentle impulse, as she spoke, and she went meekly away, Mrs Brookes closing the door behind her with an unspoken reflection on the uselessness of girls, who, whenever anything is the matter, can do nothing but cry.

The night gradually fell upon Poynings—the soft, sweet, early summer night. It crept into the sick-room, and overshadowed the still form upon the bed—the form whose stillness was to be succeeded by the fierce unrest, the torturing vague effort of fever ; it closed over the stern pompous master of Poynings, wakeful and sorely troubled. It darkened the pretty chamber, decorated with a thousand girlish treasures and simple adornments, in which Clare Carruthers was striving sorely with the first fierce trial of her prosperous young life. When it was at its darkest and deepest, the girl's swollen weary eyelids closed, conquered by the irresistible mighty benefactor of the young who suffer. Then, if any eye could have pierced the darkness and looked at her as she lay sleeping, the stamp of a great fear upon her face even in her slumber, and her breast shaken by frequent heavy sighs, it would have been seen that one hand was hidden under the pillow, and the fair cheek pressed tightly down upon it, for better security. That hand was closed upon three letters, severally addressed to the advertising

department of three of the daily newspapers. The contents, which were uniform, had cost the girl hours of anxious and agonizing thoughts. They were very simple, and were as follows, accompanied by the sum which she supposed their insertion would cost, very liberally estimated :

"The gentleman who showed a lady a sprig of myrtle on last Saturday is earnestly entreated by her not to revisit the place where he met her. He will inevitably be recognized."

"God forgive me if I am doing wrong in this!" Clare Carruthers had said with her last waking consciousness. "God forgive me, but I must save him if I can!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SHADOW LIGHTENED.

LONG before Mr Carruthers, impelled by the irresistible force of routine, which not all the concern, and even alarm, occasioned him by Mrs Carruthers's condition could subdue, had issued forth upon his daily tour of inspection, Clare's letters had been safely posted by her own hand at the village. She had slept but little on the night which had fallen on her first experience of fear and grief; and waking at dawn, oppressed by a heavy sense of some dimly-understood calamity, she had recalled it all in a moment; and having hurriedly dressed herself, she went down to the breakfast-room, and let herself out through the window, accompanied by her dog, whose joyous gambols in the bright morning air she did not notice. That morning air struck chill to the weary limbs and aching head of the sad, bewildered girl as she pursued her rapid way through the shrubbery, brushing the dew from the branches of the trees as she passed hurriedly along heart-sick, and yet wandering and confused in her thoughts.

Her walk was quite solitary and uninterrupted. She slid the letters into a convenient slit of a window-shutter of the general-

shop, to which the dignity and emoluments of a post-office were attached ; glanced up and down the little street, listened to certain desultory sounds which spoke of the commencement of activity in adjacent stable-yards, and to the barking with which some vagabond dogs of her acquaintance greeted her and Cæsar ; satisfied herself that she was unobserved, and then retraced her steps as rapidly as possible. The large white-faced clock over the stables at Poynings—an unimpeachable instrument, never known to gain or lose within the memory of man—was striking six as Clare Carruthers carefully replaced the bolt of the breakfast-room window, and crept upstairs again, with a faint flutter of satisfaction that her errand had been safely accomplished contending with the dreariness and dread which filled her heart. She put away her hat and cloak, changed her dress, which was wet with the dew, and sat down by the door of the room to listen for the first stir of life in the house.

Soon she heard her uncle's step, lighter, less creaky than usual, and went out to meet him. He did not show any surprise on seeing her so early, and the expression of his face told her in a moment that he had no good news of the invalid to communicate.

"Brookes says she has had a very bad night," he said gravely. "I am going to send for Munns at once, and to telegraph to London for more advice." Then he went on in a state of subdued creak ; and Clare, in increased bewilderment and misery, went to Mrs Carruthers's room, where she found the reign of dangerous illness seriously inaugurated.

Doctor Munns came, and early in the afternoon a grave and polite gentleman arrived from London, who was very affable, but rather reserved, and who was also guilty of the unaccountable bad taste of suggesting a shock in connection with Mrs Carruthers's illness. He also was emphatically corrected by Mr Carruthers, but not, with the same harshness which had marked that gentleman's reception of Dr Munns's suggestion. The grave gentleman from London made but little addition to Dr Munns's treatment, declined to commit himself to any decided opinion on the case, and went away, leaving Mr Carruthers with a sensation of help-

lessness and vague injury, to say nothing of downright misery and alarm, to which the Grand Lama was entirely unaccustomed.

Before the London physician made his appearance Clare and her uncle had met at breakfast, and she had learned all there was to be known on the subject which had taken entire and terrible possession of her mind. It seemed to Clare now that she had no power of thinking of anything else, that it was quite impossible that only yesterday morning she was a careless unconscious girl musing over a romantic incident in her life, speculating vaguely upon the possibility of any result accruing from it in the future, and feeling as far removed from the crimes and dangers of life as if they had no existence. Now she took her place opposite her uncle with a face whose pallor and expression of deep-seated trouble even that unobservant and self-engrossed potentate could not fail to notice. He did observe the alteration in Clare's looks, and was not altogether displeased by it. It argued deep solicitude for Mrs Carruthers of Poynings—an extremely proper sentiment ; so Mr Carruthers consoled his niece after his stately fashion, acknowledging, at the same time, the unaccountable vagaries of fever, and assuring Clare that there was nothing infectious in the case—a subject on which it had never occurred to the girl to feel any uneasiness. Not so with Mr Carruthers, who had a very great dread of illness of every kind, and a superstitious reverence for the medical art. The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the post, and Mr Carruthers's attention was again drawn to the subject of the murder and the possibility of promoting his own importance in connection with it. Clare's pale face turned paler as her uncle took up the first letter of the number presented to him by Thomas (footman), that official looking peculiarly intelligent on the occasion ; for the letter bore the magic inscription, "On Her Majesty's Service," and the seal of the Home Office.

Mr Carruthers took some time to read the letter, even with the aid of the gold eye-glasses. It came from Mr Dalrymple, who wrote an abnormally bad hand even for a government official—a circumstance which Mr Carruthers mentally combined with the beard, of which he retained an indignant remembrance as a sign of the degeneracy of the age. The irrepressible pompousness of the

man showed itself even in this crisis of affairs, as he perused the document, and laid it down upon the table under the hand armed with the eye-glasses.

Clare waited breathless.

"Hem ! my dear," he began ; "this letter is connected with the matter I mentioned to you yesterday. You remember, I dare say, about the murder, and the inquiry I was requested by the government to make at Amherst."

O yes, Clare remembered ; she had been very much interested. Had anything since transpired ?

"Nothing of any moment. This letter is from Mr Dalrymple—the gentleman who came here, as I told you, from Lord Wolsenholme."

Clare, still breathless, bowed. There was no use in trying to accelerate Mr Carruthers's speech. He was not to be hurried.

"He writes to me that the Home Secretary regrets very much the failure of our inquiries at Amherst, in eliciting any information concerning the only person on whom suspicion has as yet alighted. He informs me that, as I expected, and as I explained to you yesterday"—Mr Carruthers paused condescendingly for Clare's silent gesture of assent—"the jury at the coroner's inquest (it closed yesterday) have returned an open verdict—wilful murder against some person or persons unknown ; and the police have been instructed to use all possible vigilance to bring the criminal to light."

"Have they learned anything further about the dead man ?" asked Clare, with a timid look (half of anxiety, half of avoidance) towards the newspaper, which Mr Carruthers had not yet opened, and which no member of the family would have ventured to touch unsanctioned by the previous perusal of its august head.

"About the murdered man ?—no, I believe not. Mr Dalrymple further informs me that the fur-lined coat, and all the other less remarkable articles of clothing found on the body, are placed in the hands of the police, in hope of future identification. There is nothing more to be done, then, that I can see. Can you suggest anything, Clare !" Mr Carruthers asked the question in a tone almost of banter, as though there were something ridiculous in his

expecting a suggestion from such a quarter, but with very little real anxiety nevertheless.

"I—I really do not know, uncle," returned Clare; "I cannot tell. You are quite sure Evans told you all he knew?"

"Everything," replied Mr Carruthers. "The clue furnished by the coat was very slight, but it was the only one. I am convinced, myself, that the man who wore the coat, and was last seen in company with the murdered man, was the man who committed the murder." Clare shivered. "But," continued Mr Carruthers in an argumentative tone, "the thing to establish is the identity of the man who wore the coat with the man who bought it six weeks ago."

A bright flush rose on Clare's cheeks—a flush of surprise, of hope. "Is there any doubt about that, uncle?" she asked. "The waiter described the man, didn't he? Besides, no one would part with an overcoat in six weeks."

"*That* is by no means certain," said Mr Carruthers with an air of profound wisdom. "Artists and writers, and foreigners, and generally people of the vagabond kind, sell and barter their clothes very frequently. The young man whom Evans describes might have been any one, from his purposeless indistinguishable description; the waiter's memory is clearer, as is natural, being newer."

"And what is the description he gives?" asked Clare faintly.

"You will find it in the weekly paper, my dear," returned Mr Carruthers, stretching his hand out towards the daily journal. "Meantime let's see yesterday's proceedings."

Hope had arisen in Clare's heart. Might not all her fear be unfounded, all her sufferings vain? What if the coat had not been purchased by Paul Ward at all? She tried to remember exactly what he had said in the few jesting words that had passed on the subject. Had he said he had bought it at Amherst, or only that it had been made at Amherst? By an intense effort, so distracting and painful that it made her head ache with a sharp pain, she endeavoured to force her memory to reproduce what had passed, but in vain; she remembered only the circumstance, the fatal identification of the coat. "Artists and writers," her uncle had said, in his disdainful classification, occasionally made certain odd arrange-

ments concerning their garments unknown to the upper classes, to whom tailors and valets appertain of right; and Paul Ward was both a writer and an artist. Might he not have bought the coat from an acquaintance? Men of his class, she knew, often had queer acquaintances. The possession was one of the drawbacks of the otherwise glorious career of art and literature—people who might require to sell their coats, and be equal to doing it.

Yes there was a hope, a possibility that it might be so, and the girl seized on it with avidity. But, in a moment, the terrible recollection struck her that she was considering the matter at the wrong end. Who had bought the coat made by Evans of Amherst, and what had been its intermediate history, were things of no import. The question was, in whose possession was it when the unknown man was murdered. Had Paul Ward dined with him at the Strand Tavern? Was Paul Ward the man whom the waiter could undertake to identify, in London? If so—and the terrible pang of the conviction that so, indeed, it was, returned to her with redoubled force from the momentary relief of the doubt—the danger was in London, not there at Amherst; from the waiter, not from Evans. Distracted between the horror, overwhelming to the innocent mind of the young girl, to whom sin and crime had been hitherto dim and distant phantoms, of such guilt attaching itself to the image which she had set up for the romantic worship of her girlish heart, and the urgent terrified desire which she felt that, however guilty, he might escape—nay, the more firmly she felt convinced that he *must* be guilty, the more ardently she desired it,—Clare Carruthers's gentle breast was rent with such unendurable torture as hardly any after happiness could compensate for or efface. All this time Mr Carruthers was reading the newspaper, and at length he laid it down, and was about to address Clare, when the footman entered the room, and informed him that Mr Evans, the tailor, from Amherst, wished to be permitted to speak to him as soon as convenient. With much more alacrity than he usually displayed, Mr Carruthers desired that Evans should be shown into the library, and declared his intention of going to speak to him immediately.

"I have no doubt, Clare, that he has come about this business,"

said Mr Carruthers, when the servant had left the room. With this consolatory assurance he left her to herself. She snatched up the newspaper, and read a brief account of the proceedings of the previous day—the close of the inquest, and some indignant remarks upon the impunity with which so atrocious a crime had, to all appearance, been committed; which wound up with a supposition that this murder was destined to be included in the number of those mysteries whose impenetrability strengthened the hand of the assassin, and made our police system the standing jest of continental nations. How ardently she hoped, how nearly she dared to pray, that it might indeed be so!

She lingered in the breakfast-room, waiting for her uncle's return. The restlessness, the uncertainty of misery, were upon her; she dreaded the sight of every one, and yet she feared solitude, because of the thoughts, the convictions, the terrors, which peopled it. Three letters lay on the table still unopened; and when Clare looked at them, she found they were addressed to Mrs Carruthers, and that two of the three were from America. The postmark on each was New York, and on one were stamped the words, "Too late."

"She is too ill to read any letters now, or even to be told there are any," thought Clare. "I had better put them away, or ask my uncle to do so."

She was looking at the third letter, which was from George Dallas; but she had never seen his writing, to her knowledge; and the two words, which he had written on the slip of paper she had seen, being a Christian and surname, afforded her no opportunity of recognizing it as that of Paul Ward; when Mr Carruthers returned, looking very pompous and fussy.

"I shall communicate with the Home Office immediately," he began. "This is very important. Evans has been here to tell me he has read all the proceedings at the inquest, and the waiter's description of the suspected individual tallies precisely with his own recollection of the purchaser of the coat."

"But, uncle," said Clare, with quick intelligence, "you told me the man's evidence and Evans's description were as vague as possible. Indeed, I was quite struck by what you said: 'A

description that describes nothing' were your words. And don't you remember telling me how frequently you had observed in your magisterial capacity that these people never could be depended on to give an accurate account of an impression or a circumstance? And how you have told me that it was one of the chief distinctions between the educated and uneducated mind, that only the former could comprehend the real value and meaning of evidence? Depend on it, Evans has no new ground for his conviction. He has been reading the papers, and thinking over the importance of being mixed up in the matter, until he has persuaded himself into this notion. Don't you recollect that is just what you said you were sure he would do?"

Mr Carruthers did not remember anything of the kind, nor did Clare. But the girl was progressing rapidly in the lessons which strong emotion teaches, and which add years of experience to hours of life. Instinctively she took advantage of the weakness of her uncle's character, which she comprehended without acknowledging. Mr Carruthers had no objection to the imputation of superior sagacity conveyed in Clare's remark, and accepted the suggestion graciously; he was particularly pleased to learn that he had drawn that acute distinction between the educated and uneducated mind. It was like him, he thought: he was not a man on whom experience was wasted.

"Yes, yes, I remember, of course, my dear," replied Mr Carruthers, graciously; "but then, you see, however little I may think of Evans's notions on the subject, I am bound to communicate with the Home Office. If Mrs Carruthers's illness did not render my absence improper and impossible, I should go to London myself, and lay the matter before Lord Wolstenholme; but, as I cannot do that, I must write at once." Mr Carruthers, in his secret soul, regarded the obligation with no little dread, and would have been grateful for a suggestion which he would not have condescended to ask for.

"Then I will leave you, uncle," said Clare, making a strong effort to speak as cheerfully as possible, "to your task of telling the big wigs that there is nothing more to be done or known down here. You might make them laugh, if such solemn, grand

people ever laugh, by telling them how the rural mind believes two vaguenesses to make a certainty, and make them grateful that Evans came to you, and not to them, with his mare's nest of corroborative evidence."

Clare's fair face was sharpened with anxiety as she spoke, despite the brightness of her tone, and she had narrowly watched the effect of her words. Her uncle felt that they conveyed precisely the hint he required, and was proportionally relieved.

"Of course, of course," he answered, in his grandest manner; and Clare moved towards the door, when, remembering the letters, she said:

"There are some letters for Mrs Carruthers, uncle. I fancy she is too ill to see them. Two are from America; will you take them?"

"I take them, Clare, why?" asked her uncle, in a tone of dignified surprise.

"Only because, being foreign letters, I thought they might require attention—that's all," said Clare, feeling herself rebuked for a vulgarity. "They come from New York."

"Probably from Mr Felton," said Mr Carruthers, pointing the gold eye-glasses at the letters in Clare's hand with dignified coldness, but making no attempt to look at them nearer. "You had better lay them aside, or give them to Brookes or Dixon. I never meddle with Mrs Carruthers's family correspondence."

Clare made her escape with the letters, feeling as if her ears had, morally speaking, been boxed; and diverted, for a little, by the sensation from the devouring anxiety she had felt that Mr Carruthers should communicate in the tone which she had tried to insinuate with the dignitaries of the Home Office.

The door of Mrs Carruthers's room was open, and the curtain partly withdrawn, when Clare reached it. She called softly to Dixon, but received no reply. Then she went in, and found the housekeeper again in attendance upon the patient. To her inquiries she received from Mrs Brookes very discouraging replies, and the old woman stated her conviction strongly that it was going to be a very bad business, and that Clare had much better go to the Sycamores.

"You can't do any good here, Miss Carruthers," said the old woman ; and Clare thought she had never heard her speak so sternly and harshly. "I don't know that any one can do any good ; but you can't anyhow, and the fever may be catching."

Clare's eyes filled with tears, not only because she loved Mrs Carruthers, not only because another trouble was added to the crushing misery that had fallen upon her, but also because it hurt her gentle nature keenly to feel herself of no account.

"No," she said, in a low voice, "I know I am of no use, Mrs Brookes. I am not her child. If I were, I should not be expected to leave her. And," she added bitterly, for the first time treading on the forbidden ground, "more than that, if it were not for me, her son might be with her now, perhaps."

"Hush, hush, pray," whispered Mrs Brookes, with a frightened glance at the bed ; "don't say that word ! She may hear and understand more than we think."

Clare looked at her in bewilderment, but obeyed her, and asked no questions.

"These came just now," she said, "my uncle desired me to give them to you."

She put the letters into the old woman's hand, and crossed the room, leaving it by the opposite door, which communicated with Mrs Carruthers's dressing-room. As she passed through the inner apartment, which opened on the corridor, she observed that the portrait of George Dallas, which had hung upon the wall as long as she remembered the room, was no longer there.

The hidden anguish in her own heart, the secret which was crushing her own young spirit, made the girl quick to see and interpret any sign of similar sorrow and mystery.

"Mrs Brookes has taken away her son's picture," Clare thought, as she slowly descended the stairs, "and she dreads his name being mentioned in her presence. Dr Munns asked if she had had a shock, and seemed to impute her illness to something of the kind. There is something wrong with George Dallas, and the two know it."

When Miss Carruthers left her, Mrs Brookes broke the seal of one of the letters without a moment's hesitation, and read its con-

tents, standing shielded from any possible observation by the invalid by the curtains of the bed. The letter contained only a few lines :

"I am going away, out of England, for a little while, my dearest mother," George Dallas wrote. *"It is necessary for the transaction of my business ; but I did not know it would be so when I last communicated with you. Write to me at the subjoined address : your letter will be forwarded."* The address given was Routh's, at South Molton-street.

The old woman sighed heavily as she read the letter, and then resumed her attendance on her patient.

The day waned, the London physician came and went. The household at Poynings learned little of their mistress's state. There was little to be learned. That night a letter was written to George Dallas, by Mrs Brookes, which was a harder task to the poor old woman than she had ever been called upon to fulfil. With infinite labour, she wrote as follows :

"MY DEAR MASTER GEORGE,—Your letter has come, so I know you are not in England, and I am not sure but that some one else may see this. Your mother is very ill, in consequence of what she has seen in the papers. I do not believe it is as bad as it seems, though how bad that is, thank God, no one but your mother and I know, or can ever know, I hope and trust. Think of all the strongest and most imploring things I could say to you, my own dear boy, if it was safe to say anything, and if you can put us out of suspense, by writing, not to her, not on any account to her, but to me, do so. But if you can't, George—and think what I feel in saying that *if*—keep away, don't let her hear of you, don't let her think of you in danger. Anyhow, God save, and help, and forgive you.

"Your affectionate old Nurse,

"ELLEN."

The days went on, as time travels in sickness and in health, and there was little change in Mrs Carruthers, and little hope at Poynings. The fever had been pronounced not infectious, and Clare

had not been banished to the Sycamores. No fresh alarm had arisen to agitate her, no news of the suspected man had been obtained. The matter had apparently been consigned to oblivion. With the subsidence of her first terror and agitation, a deeper horror and dread had grown upon Clare. Supposing, as it seemed, that he was safe now, Paul Ward was still a guilty wretch, a creature to be shunned by the pure, even in thought. And the more she felt this, and thought of it, the more frankly Clare confessed to her own heart that she had loved him, that she had set him up, with so little knowledge of him after their chance meeting, as an idol in the shrine of her girlish fancy—an idol defaced and overthrown now, a shrine for ever defiled and desecrated. She was glad to think she had warned him; she wondered how much that warning had contributed to his security. She strove hard to banish the remembrance of him in all but its true aspect of abhorrence, but she did not always succeed; and, in the innocent girl's dreams, the smile, the voice, the frank kindly words would often come again, and make her waking to the jarring gladness of the morning terrible. A shadow fell upon her beauty, the gleeful tone died out of her voice; the change of an indelible sorrow passed upon the girl, but passed unnoticed by herself or any other.

The days went on, as time travels in sorrow and in joy; and at length a change came in Mrs Carruthers, and there was hope at Poynings. Not hope, indeed, that she could ever be again as she had been, beautiful and stately in her serene and honoured matronhood, in her bright intelligence and dignity. That was not to be. She recovered; that is, she did not die, but she died to much of the past. She was an old woman from thenceforth, and all her beauty, save the immortal beauty of form, had left her very quiet, very patient and gentle, but of feeble nerves, and with little memory for the past, and little attention or interest in the present; she was the merest wreck of what she had been. Her faithful old servant was not so much distressed by the change as were her husband and Clare. She had her own reasons for thinking it better that it should be so. For many days after convalescence had been declared, she had watched and waited, sick with apprehension for some sign of recollection on the part of the patient,

but none came, and the old woman, while she grieved with exceeding bitterness over the wreck of all she so dearly loved, thanked God in her heart that even thus relief had come. None had come otherwise. George Dallas had made no sign.

So the time went on, and summer was in its full pomp and pride when preparations were being made on a scale suitable to the travelling arrangements of magnates of the importance of Mr Carruthers of Poynings for a continental tour, recommended by the physicians in attendance as a means for the complete restoration of Mrs Carruthers. The time named for the departure of Mr and Mrs Carruthers had nearly arrived, and it had just been arranged that Clare should remain at the Sycamores during their absence, when Mr Carruthers startled Mrs Brookes considerably by asking her if she could inform him where a communication might be expected to find Mr George Dallas? It would have been impossible for human ingenuity to have devised a question more unexpected by its recipient, and Mrs Brookes was genuinely incapable of answering it for a moment, and showed her fear and surprise so plainly, that Mr Carruthers, much softened by recent events, condescended to explain why he had asked it.

"I do not consider it proper that the young man should be left in ignorance of his mother's state of health and her absence from England," he said, with less stateliness than usual; "and though I do not inquire into the manner and frequency of his communications with Mrs Carruthers, I believe I am correct in supposing he has not written to her lately."

"Not lately, sir," replied Mrs Brookes.

The result of this colloquy was that Mrs Brookes gave Mr Carruthers Routh's address at South Molton-street, and that Mr Carruthers addressed a short epistle to George Dallas, in which he curtly informed his step-son that his mother, having just recovered from a dangerous illness which had enfeebled her mind considerably, was about to travel on the Continent for an indefinite period, during which, if he (Mr Carruthers) should see any cause for so doing, he would communicate further with Mr George Dallas. This letter was posted on the day which witnessed the departure of Mr and Mrs Carruthers "and suite" (as the County Chronicle was

careful to notice) from Poynings ; and Mr Carruthers felt much conscious self-approval for having written it, and especially for having timed the writing of it so well. "Sooner, he might have made an excuse of it for coming here," thought the astute gentleman ; "and it would have been heartless not to have written at all."

For once in his life Mr Carruthers of Poynings had written a letter of importance.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE MUIDERSTRAAT.

HIGH houses, broad, jolly, and red-faced, standing now on the edges of quays or at the feet of bridges, now in quaint trim little gardens, whose close-shaven turf is gaudy with brilliant bulbs, or overshadowed by box and yew, but always fringing the long, shallow, black canals, whose sluggish waters scarcely ripple under the passing barge. Water, water, everywhere, and requiring everybody's first consideration, dammed out by vast dykes and let in through numerous sluices, spanned by nearly three hundred bridges, employing a perfect army of men to watch it and tend it, to avail themselves of its presence and yet to keep it in subjection ; for if not properly looked after and skilfully managed, it might at any moment submerge the city ; avenues of green trees running along the canal banks and blooming freshly in the thickest portions of the commerce-crowded quays ; innumerable windmills on the horizon ; picture-galleries rich in treasures of Rubens, Rembrandt, Vandyke, and Teniers ; dock-yards, where square and sturdy ships are built by square and sturdy men, in solemn silence and with much pipe-smoking ; asylums, homes, alms-houses, through which a broad stream of well-administered charity is always flowing. A population of grave burghers, and chattering vrows, and the fattest, shiniest, and most old-fashioned children ; of outlandish

sailors and Jews of the grand old type, who might have sat, and whose ancestors probably did sit, as models to Rembrandt; of stalwart bargemen and canal-tenders, of strangers, some pleasure-seeking, but the great majority intent on business; for whatever may be the solemn delights of its inhabitants, to a stranger accustomed to other capitals there are few gaieties to be met with in the city to which George Dallas had wended his way—Amsterdam.

To George Dallas this mattered very little. Of the grosser kinds of pleasure he had had enough and more than enough; the better feelings of his nature had been awakened, and nothing could have induced him to allow himself to drift back into the slough from which he had emerged. Wandering through the long picture-galleries and museums, and gloating over their contents with thorough artistic appreciation, dreamily gazing out of his hotel window over a prospect of barge-dotted and tree-bordered canals which would gradually dissolve before his eyes, the beech avenue of the Sycamores arising in its place, recalling Clare Carruthers's soft voice and ringing laugh and innocent trusting manner, George Dallas could scarcely believe that for months and months of his past life he had been the companion of sharpers and gamblers, and had been cut off from all communication with everything and everybody that in his youth he had been taught to look up to and respect. He shuddered as he recollected the orgies which he had taken part in, the company he had kept, the life he had led. He groaned aloud and stamped with rage as he thought of time lost, character blighted, opportunities missed. And his rage this time was vented on himself: he did not, as usual, curse his step-father for having pronounced his edict of banishment; he did not lay the blame on luck or fate, which generally bore the burden; he was man enough to look his past life fairly in the face, and to own to himself that all its past privations, and what might have been its future miseries, were of his own creation. What might have been, but what should not be now. A new career lay before him, a career of honour and fame, inducements to pursue which such as he had never dreamed of were not wanting, and by Heaven's help he would succeed.

It was on the first morning after his arrival in Amsterdam that

George Dallas, after much desultory thought, thus determined. Actuated by surroundings in an extraordinary degree, he had, while in London, been completely fascinated by the combined influence of Routh and Harriet ; and had he remained with them he would, probably, never have shaken off that influence, or been anything but their ready instrument. But so soon as he had left them the fascination was gone, and his eyes were open to the degradation of his position, and the impossibility, so long as he continued with his recent associates, of retrieving himself in the eyes of the world—of being anything to Clare Carruthers. This last thought decided him—he would break with Stewart Routh, yes, and with Harriet, at once ! He would sell the bracelet and send the proceeds to Routh with a letter, in which he would delicately but firmly express his determination and take farewell of him and Harriet. Then he would return to London, and throw himself into business at once. There was plenty for him to do at the *Mercury*, the chief had said, and—No ! he must not go back to London, he must not expose himself to temptation ; at all events until he was more capable of resisting it. Now, there would be Routh, with his jovial blandishments, and Deane, and all the set, and Harriet, most dangerous of all ! In London he would fall back into George Dallas, the outcast, the reprobate, the black sheep, not rise into Paul Ward, the genius ; and it was under the latter name that he had made acquaintance with Clare, and that he hoped to rise into fame and repute.

But though the young man had, as he imagined, fully made up his mind as to his future course, he lounged through a whole day in Amsterdam before he took the first step necessary for its pursuance—the negotiation of the bracelet and the transmission of the money to Routh—and it is probable that any movement in the matter would have been yet further delayed had he not come to the end of the slender stock of money which he had brought with him from England. The reaction from a life of fevered excitement to one of perfect calm, the atmosphere of comfortable, quiet, staid tranquillity by which he was surrounded, the opportunity for indulging his artistic sympathies without the slightest trouble, all these influences were readily adopted by a man of George Dallas's

desultory habits and easy temperament ; but, at last, it was absolutely necessary that some action should be taken, and George consulted the polyglot waiter of the hotel as to the best means of disposing of some valuable diamonds which he had with him.

The question was evidently one to which the polyglot waiter was well accustomed, for he answered at once, "Dimants to puy is best by Mr Dieverbrug, in Muiderstraat."

Not thoroughly comprehending the instance of the polyglottiness of the polyglot, George Dallas again advanced to the charge, and by varying his methods of attack, and diligently patching together such intelligible scraps as he rescued from the polyglot, he at length arrived at the fact that Mr Dieverbrug, a Jew, who lived in the Muiderstraat, was a diamond merchant in a large way of business, speaking English, frequently visiting England, and likely to give as good, if not a better price than any one else in the trade. The polyglot added that he himself was not a bad judge of what he persisted in calling "dimants ;" and as this speech was evidently a polite hint, George showed him the stones. The polyglot admired them very much, and pronounced them, in his opinion, worth between two and three hundred pounds—a valuable hint to George, who expected Mr Dieverbrug would call upon him to name his price, and if any absurd sum was asked, the intending vendor might be looked upon with suspicion. The polyglot then owned that he himself frequently did a little business in the way of jewel-purchasing from visitors to the hotel, but frankly confessed that the "lot" under consideration was beyond him ; so George thanked him and set out to visit Mr Dieverbrug.

The Muiderstraat is the Jews' quarter of Amsterdam, which said, it is scarcely necessary to add that it is the dirtiest, the foulest, the most evil-smelling. There all the well-known characteristics of such places flourish more abundantly even than in the Frankfort Judengasse or our own Houndsditch. There each house is the repository of countless suits of fusty clothes, heaped up in reckless profusion on the floors, bulging out from cupboards and presses, horribly suggestive of vermin, hanging from poles protruding from the windows. There every cellar bristles with an array of boots of all kinds and shapes, amongst which the little Hebrew children

squall and fight, and play at their little games of defrauding each other. There are the *bric-à-brac* shops, crammed with cheap odds and ends from every quarter of the globe, all equally undistinguishable under an impartial covering of dust and dirt; there are the booksellers, with their worm-eaten folios and their copies of the Scriptures, and their written announcements in the Hebrew character; there are the cheap printsellers, with smeary copies from popular pictures and highly coloured daubs of French battle-fields and English hunting-scenes. The day was fine, and nearly all the population was either standing outside its doors or lolling at its windows, chaffering, higgling, joking, scolding. George Dallas, to whom such a scene was an entire novelty, walked slowly along with difficulty, threading his way through the various groups, amused with all he saw, and speculating within himself as to the probable personal appearance of Mr Dieverbrug. The diamond merchant, George imagined, would probably be an old man, with gray hair and spectacles, and a large hooked nose, like one of Rembrandt's "Misers," seated in a small shop, surrounded by the rarest treasures exquisitely set. But when he arrived at the number which the polyglot had given him as Mr Dieverbrug's residence, he found a small shop indeed, but it was a bookseller's, and it was not until after some little time that he spied a painted inscription on the door-post directing Mr Dieverbrug's visitors to the first floor, whither George at once proceeded.

At a small wooden table, on which stood a set of brass balance weights, sat a man of middle height and gentlemanly appearance dressed in black. The Hebraic character was not strongly marked in any of his features, though it was perceptible to an acute observer in the aquiline nose and the full red lips. He raised his eyes from a small red-leather memorandum-book or diary which he had been studying, as Dallas entered the room, and gave his visitor a grave salutation.

"Am I addressing Mr Dieverbrug?" said Dallas, in English.

"I am Mr Dieverbrug," he replied, in the same language, speaking with perfect ease and with very little foreign accentuation, "at your service."

"I have been recommended to come to you. I am, as you have

probably already recognized, an Englishman, and I have some jewels for sale, which it may, perhaps, suit you to buy."

"You have them with you?"

"Yes, they are here;" and George took out his cherished case and placed it in Mr Dieverbrug's hand.

Mr Dieverbrug opened the case quietly, and walked with it towards the window. He then took out the stones and held them to the light, then taking from his waistcoat pocket a small pair of steel nippers, he picked up each stone separately, breathed upon it, examined it attentively, and then replaced it in the case. When he had gone through this operation with all the stones, he said to George:

"You are not a diamond merchant?"

"No, indeed!" said Dallas, with a half-laugh; "not I."

"You have never," said Mr Dieverbrug, looking at him steadfastly from under his bushy eyebrows,—“you have never been in a jewel-house?"

"In a jewel-house?" echoed George.

"What you call a jeweller's shop?"

"Never have been in a jeweller's shop? O yes, often."

"Still you fail my meaning. You have never been in a jeweller's shop as employé, as assistant?"

"Assistant at a jeweller's—ah! thank you! now I see what you're aiming at. I've never been an assistant in a jeweller's shop, you ask, which is a polite way of inquiring if I robbed my master of these stones! Thank you very much; if you've that opinion of me, perhaps I had better seek my bargain elsewhere." And George Dallas, shaking all over, and very much flushed in the face, extended his hand for the case.

Mr Dieverbrug smiled softly as he said, "If I thought that, I would have bid you go about your business at once. There are plenty of merchants at Amsterdam who would buy from you, no matter whence you came; but it is my business to ask such questions as to satisfy myself. Will you have back your diamonds, or shall I ask my questions?"

He spoke in so soft a tone, and he looked so placid and so thoroughly uncaring which way the discussion ended, that George

Dallas could scarcely forbear laughing as he replied, "Ask away!"

"Ask away," repeated Mr Dieverbrug, still with his soft smile. "Well, then, you are not a jeweller's employé; I can tell that by your manner, which also shows me that you are not what you call swell-mob-man—rascal—escroc. So you come to me with valuable diamonds to sell; my questions are, How do you get these diamonds? Who are you?"

For an instant George Dallas paused in his reply, while he felt the blood rise in his cheeks. He next looked Mr Dieverbrug straight in the face, as he said, "These were family diamonds. I inherited them from my mother—who is dead—and I was advised to come over here to sell them, this being the best market. As to myself, I am a literary man, a contributor to newspapers, and an author."

"Ah, ha! you write in newspapers and books? You are a feuilletonist, author?" As Mr Dieverbrug said these words he took up a stick which stood by the side of the fireplace and thumped heavily on the floor. His thumping seemed to awaken a kind of smothered response from the regions below them, and before George Dallas had recovered from his surprise, the door was opened, and an old gentleman of fantastic appearance entered the room—a very little man, with an enormous head, which was covered with a tight-fitting little skull-cap, large eyes glaring out of silver-rimmed spectacles, a sallow puckered face fringed with a short stubbly white beard, a large aquiline nose, and thin tight lips. Buttoning immediately under his chin and reaching to his feet—no very long distance—the little man wore a greasy red flannel gaberdine dressing-gown, with flat horn buttons in a row down the front, underneath which appeared a dubiously dirty pair of flannel stockings and bright red-leather slippers. With one hand the little man leaned on an ivory-handled crutch-stick; in the other he carried a yellow-paper covered book—Tauchnitz edition of some English author. As he entered the room he gave a sharp, rapid, comprehensive glance at George through his spectacles, made him a deferential bow, and then took up his position in the closest proximity to Mr Dieverbrug, who at once addressed him in Dutch with such volubility that George, who had managed to pick up a few words

during his stay, from the polyglot and others, failed to comprehend one syllable of what passed between them.

When they had finished their parley, during which both of them looked at the diamonds and then at George, and then waved their fingers in each other's faces, and beat the palms of their hands, and shrugged their shoulders as though they never intended their heads to be again seen, Mr Dieverbrug turned to George, and said, "This is my brother-in-law, Mr Schaub, who keeps the bookseller's shop beneath us. He is agent for some English booksellers and newspapers, and knows more about authors than you would think. I should be glad if you would have some talk with him."

"Glad I should have some talk with him?" George Dallas commenced in wonderment; but Mr Schaub cut in at once:

"Ye-es! Vos glad should have tokes mit eem! Should mit eem converse—sprechen, dis English author!"

"English author?"

"M-ja! m-ja! Wass him, der Schaub"—tapping himself in the middle of his greasy breast with his ivory-handled crutch—"agent von Tauchnitz, Galignani, die London *Times*, die *Mercury*, and von all. Wass der Schaub knows all, and der Mynheer is English author, der Schaub must know von the Mynheer!"

George Dallas looked at him for a few moments in great bewilderment, then turned to Mr Dieverbrug. "Upon my honour," he said, "I should be delighted to carry out your wish and have some talk with this old gentleman, but I don't see my way to preventing the conversation being all on his side. The fact is, I don't understand one word he says!"

With the old sly smile, Mr Dieverbrug said, "My brother-in-law's talk is perhaps somewhat idiomatic, and one is required to be used to it. What he would convey is, that he, acquainted as he is with English literature and journalism, would like to know what position you hold in it, what you have written, where you have been engaged, and such-like. It is no object of 'us to disguise to you that he brings his experience to aid me in deciding whether or not I consider myself justified in making a dealing with you for these stones."

"Thanks! I comprehend perfectly, and, of course, cannot ob-

ject ; though," added George, with a smile, "I am afraid I have not as yet made sufficient mark in English literature to render me a classic, or even to have gained a continental reputation for my name. Stay, though. Mr Schaub, if I understood him rightly, represented himself as agent for one London paper to which I have contributed under my signature—the *Mercury*. You know the *Mercury*, Mr Schaub? I thought so, and perhaps you have seen some articles there signed Paul Ward?"

"M-ja! m-ja! Wass von die 'Strangers in London,' von Paul Ward, am Nordjten, Hollandischen, Deutschen sea-people, von sailors would call zum visitiren?"

"That's it, sir! Descriptions," continued George, turning to Mr Dieverbrug, "of the foreign sea-going populations of London."

"M-ja, of Highway, of Shadeliffe, Ratcliffe, Shadwell, vot you call! M-ja, of Paul Ward writings I am acquaint."

"And you are Paul Ward?" asked Mr Dieverbrug.

"I am that apparently distinguished person," said George.

Then Mr Dieverbrug and Mr Schaub plunged pell-mell into another conversation, in which though the tongues rattled volubly enough, the shoulders and the eyebrows and the fingers played almost as important parts, the result being that Mr Dieverbrug turned to George and said, "I am quite satisfied to undertake this affair, Mr Ward, from what my brother-in-law has said of your position. Another question is, what shall I give you for the stones?"

"From what your brother-in-law has said of my position, Mr Dieverbrug," said George, "it will, I presume, be apparent to you that I am not likely to be much versed in such matters, and that I must, to a great extent, be dependent on you."

"But have you some notion of price?"

"I have a notion—nothing more."

"And that notion is—?"

"Well, I imagine the worth of these stones is about two hundred and fifty pounds!"

At these words Mr Schaub gave a short sharp scream of horror, plunging his hands up to the elbows in the pockets of the red flannel gaberdine, and glaring at George through the silver-rimmed

glasses. Mr Dieverbrug was not so wildly affected; he only smiled the soft smile a little more emphatically than before, and said:

"There is now no doubt, my dear sir, even if we had doubted it before, of your living in the region of romance! These must be Monte Christo diamonds, of Mr Dumas's own setting, to judge by the value you place on them—eh?"

"Wass won hondert fifty is vat worths," said Mr Schaub.

But, fortified in his own mind by the opinion of the polyglot waiter, who evidently had not spoken without some knowledge, George at once and peremptorily declined his bid, and so to work they went. The stones were had out again, re-examined, weighed in the brass balances, breathed upon, held up to the light between the steel pincers, and, at length, after a sharp discussion, carried on with most vivid pantomime between the brothers-in-law, Mr Dieverbrug consented to buy them for one hundred and eighty pounds, and George Dallas accepted his offer. Then from the recesses of a drawer in the little wooden table Mr Dieverbrug produced a cash-box and counted out the sum in Dutch coin and gulden notes, and handing it to George, and shaking hands with him, the transaction was completed.

Completed, so far as Mr Dieverbrug was concerned; but Mr Schaub had yet an interest in it. That worthy followed George Dallas down the stairs, and, as he would have made his exit, drew him into the bookseller's shop—a dark dirty den of a place, with old mildewed folios littering the floor, with new works smelling of print and paper ranged along the counter, with countless volumes pile on pile, heaped against the walls. With his skinny yellow hand resting on George's sleeve, the old man stood confronting George in the midst of the heterogeneous assemblage, and peering up into his face through the silver-rimmed glasses, said:

"And so he was Paul Vart—eh? Dis young man was Paul Vart, von London aus? And Paul Vart vill back to London, and Hollandisch money no good there—eh? Best change for English, and der old Schaub shall change for eem—eh?"

"I'm not going back to London, Mr Schaub," said George, after a few moments' puzzling over the old man's meaning. "I'm not

going back to London ; but I shall want to change this money, as I must send some of it, the larger portion, to England by to-night's post, and I am going to the bank to change it."

"Wass! der bank! der nonsense! It is the old Schaub vot vill change! Give de good rates and all! Ach, der old Schaub vot has der English bank-note to send mit dem posttrager! Der old Schaub vot den miser dey call! Der Schaub vill change die gulden for den bank-notes, m-ja!"

"It does not matter to me much who changes it, so long as I get the proper value!" said George with a laugh; "and if the old Schaub, as you call yourself, can give me bank-notes for a hundred and forty-pounds, I'll say done with you at once!"

"Wass vat was 'done' mit me for a hundert forty pounds! See—first vill make the door to. Let das folk call miser old Schaub, but not let das folk see vot old Schaub misers. Ha, ha!"

So saying the old gentleman closed the door of the shop, and locked it carefully. Then he retired to the back of the counter, removed several heavy old books from one of the shelves, and unlocked a secret closet in the wall. When he turned again to George, whom he had left on the other side of the counter, he had a little roll of English bank-notes in his hand. From this he selected four notes—two of the value of fifty, and two of twenty pounds. These he handed to Dallas, receiving the equivalent in Dutch money

"I am very much obliged to you indeed, Mr Schaub," said George. "By doing this for me, you've saved my going to the bank, and a good deal of trouble."

"Obliged to him is not at all, mein goot freund, Vart—Paul Vart," said the old gentleman. "Miser das folk calls old Schaub, but it is not that; he has his leetle commissions, vy not he as vell as banks? Goot deal of money pass through old Schaub's hands, and of vot pass none go clean through, always von little shticks to him fingers!"

That night George Dallas wrote to Stewart Routh, enclosing him the money, and telling him that literary engagements had sprung up which might perhaps keep him some little time from London. The letter despatched, he felt a different man. The

tie was loosed, the coupling-chain was broken! No longer enthralled by a debt of gratitude to vice, he could try what he could do to make a name—a name which his mother should not blush to hear—a name which should be murmured with delight by Clare Carruthers!

CHAPTER XVI.

IDLESSE.

WHEN George Dallas had relieved his conscience by despatching the money to Routh, he felt that he had sufficiently discharged a moral duty to enable him to lie fallow for a little time and reflect upon the excellence of the deed, without immediately pushing forward on that career of stern duty which he had prescribed for himself. In his desultory frame of mind it afforded him the greatest pleasure to sit apart in the quaintly-trimmed gardens, or on the shady quays, idly looking on the life passing before him, thinking that he was no longer in the power of those who had so long exercised an evil influence over him, and recollecting that out of the balance of the sum which he had received from Mr Dieverbrug he had enough left to keep him without any absolute necessity for resorting to work for some little time to come. For George Dallas was essentially an idler and a dreamer, an intending well-doer, but steeped to the lips in procrastination, and without the smallest knowledge of the realities of life. He had hopes and ambitions, newly kindled, as one might say; honest aspirations, such as in most men would have proved spurs to immediate enterprise; but George Dallas lay about on the seats of the public gardens, or leaned against the huge trees bordering the canals, and as he puffed into the air the light-blue smoke, and watched it curling and eddying above his head, he thought how delightful it would be to see Clare Carruthers blushing with delight at his literary success; he pictured himself

telling her how he had at last succeeded in making a name, and how the desire of pleasing her had been his greatest incentive ; he saw his mother trembling and joyous, his step-father with his arms open, and his cheque-book at his step-son's disposal ; he had a dim vision of Amherst church, and flower-strewing maidens, and ringing bells, and cheering populace,—and then he puffed out a little more smoke, and thought that he really must begin to think about getting into harness again.

As a first step to this desirable result, he paid his bill at the Amsterdam hotel, and started off for the Hague, where he remained for a fortnight, enjoying himself in the laziest and pleasantest manner, lounging in the picture-gallery and the royal library, living remarkably well, smoking a great deal, and thinking about Clare Carruthers ; and in odd half-hours, after breakfast or before he went to bed, doing a little literary work—transcript of his day's observations—which he sent to the *Mercury*, with a line to Grafton Leigh, telling him that private affairs had necessitated his coming abroad, but that when he returned he would keep the promise he had made of constant contributions to the paper ; meanwhile he sent a few sketches, just to keep his hand in. In reply to this letter he received a communication from his friend Cunningham, telling him that his chief was much pleased with the articles, and would be glad, as George was so near, if he would go over to Amsterdam, and write an account of the starting of the fleet for the herring-fishery—an event which was just about to come off, and which, owing to special circumstances at the time, excited a peculiar interest in England. In this letter Cunningham enclosed another, which he said had been for some time lying at the office, and which, on opening, George found to be from the proprietors of the *Piccadilly*, presenting their compliments to Mr Paul Ward, stating that they were recommended by their "literary adviser," who was much struck by the brilliancy and freshness of so much of Mr Paul Ward's serial story as had been sent in, to accept that story for their magazine ; regretting that Mr Ward's name was not yet sufficiently well known to enable them to give the sum he had named as his price, but offering him, on the whole, very handsome terms.

So it had come at last! No longer to struggle on, a wretched outsider, a component of the "ruck" in the great race for name and fame and profit, but one of the select, taking the leading place in the leading periodical of the day, with the chance, if fortune favoured him, and he could only avail himself of the opportunity so long denied, and call into action the influences so long prompting him, of rendering himself from month to month an object of interest, a living something, an actual necessity to thousands of people whose faces he should never see, and who would yet know of him, and look with the deepest interest on the ideal creatures of his fancy. Pardon the day-dream now, for the good to be derived from action is now so real, so tangible, that the lotos-leaves shall soon be cast aside. And yet how fascinating is the vision which their charm has ever evoked for the young man bound under their spell! Honour, wealth, fame, love!—not all your riches, Capel Carruthers; not your county position, not your territorial influence, not your magisterial dignity, nor anything else on which you pride yourself, shall be half as sweet to you as the dignified pride of the man who looks around him, and seeing himself possessed of all these enviable qualities, says: "By my own hand, by the talent which God has given me, and by His help alone, unaided by birth, or riches, or influence, I have made myself what I am!" The crisis in George Dallas's life had arrived; the ball was at his feet, and with the opportunity so urgent on him, all his desultoriness, all his lazy dilettanteism, vanished. He felt at last that life was real and earnest, and determined to enter upon it at once. With what big schemes his heart was filled, with what quixotic dreams his brain was bursting! In his own mind his triumphant position in the future was so assured that he could not resist taking an immediate foretaste of his happiness; and so on the very day of the receipt of Cunningham's letter a box containing some very rare Japanese fans, screens, and china, was despatched anonymously, addressed to Miss Carruthers. The cost of these trifles barely left George Dallas enough to pay his fare back to Amsterdam. But what of that? Was he not on the high road to fortune, and could he not make money as he liked?

The polyglot waiter received him, if not with open arms, at least

with a smiling face and a babble of many-tongued welcomes, and placed in his hands a letter which had been more than a week awaiting him. George glanced at its superscription, and a shadow crossed his face as he recognized Routh's hand-writing. He had looked upon that connection as so completely cut asunder, that he had forgotten his last communication necessitated a reply—an acknowledgment of the receipt of the money, at least—and he opened the letter with an undefined sensation of annoyance. He read as follows :

S. M.-street, June —, 18—.

"Your letter, my dear George, and its enclosure is 'to hand,' as we say in Tokenhouse-yard ; and I flatter myself that you, who know something of me, and who have seen inside my waistcoat, know that I am highly pleased at the return you have made for what you ridiculously term my 'enormous kindness,' and at the feeling which has prompted you, at, I am certain, some self-sacrifice, to return me the sum which I was only too pleased to be able to place at your disposal. I am a bad hand, as you, great author, literary swell, &c., &c., will soon see—I am a bad hand at fencing off what I have got to say, and therefore I must out with it at once. I know it ought to be put in a postscript—just dropped *par hasard*, as though it were an after-thought, and not the real gist of the letter—but I do not understand that kind of 'caper,' and so must say what I have got to say in my own way. So look here ! I am ten years older than you in years, and thirty years in experience ; and I know what heart-burnings and worries, not merely for yourself alone, but for others very, very dear to you, you have had in raising this money which you have sent to me. You thought it a debt of honour, and consequently moved heaven and earth to discharge it ; and you knew that I was hard up—a fact which had an equally irritating effect on you. Now look here ! (I have said that before, I see ; but never mind !) As to the honour—well, not to mince matters, it was a gambling debt, *pur et simple* ; and when I reflect, as I do sometimes—Harriet knows that, and will tell you so—I know well enough that but for me you would never have been led into gambling. I am not preaching, old fellow ; I am simply speaking the honest truth.

Well, the thought that you have had all this to go through, and such a large sum of money to pay, yerks me, and goes against the grain. And then, as to my being hard up, don't mind telling you—of course in the strictest confidence—that Tokenhouse-yard is a tremendous success! It was a tight time some months ago, and no mistake; but I think we have weathered the storm, and the money is rolling in there splendidly; so splendidly and so rapidly, that—again in the strictest confidence—I am thinking of launching out a little, and taking up the position which—you'll know I'm not bragging, old boy—my birth and education warrant me in assuming. I have grovelled on long enough, heaven knows, and I want to see myself, and above all, I want to see my wife, out of the reach of—well, I need not dilate to you on what circumstances have lowered us to, and what we will now float above. So, as good luck is nothing unless one's friends share in it, I want to say to you, as delicately as I can, 'Share in mine!' Don't be in a hurry to send me back that money, don't be too proud—that's not the word, George—I should say, don't fear to remain in my debt; and, if occasion should arise, let me be your banker for further sums. I can stand the racket, and shall be only too glad to be called upon to do so, as some slight way of atoning for having led you into what cannot be looked upon by any one, I am afraid, as a reputable life. I won't say any more on this head, because there is no need. You will know that I am in earnest in what I have said, and you will receive the fifty pounds which I have enclosed herein in the spirit in which they are sent—that of true friendship. You will be a great gun some day, if you fulfil the promise made for you by those who ought to know about it; and then you will repay me. Meanwhile, depend on it that any draft of yours on me will be duly honoured.

"And so you are not coming back to London for some time? It seems an ungenerous thing in a friend to say, but upon my soul I think the wisest thing you can do is to remain abroad, and widen your knowledge of life. You have youth and health, at your time of life the powers of observation are at their freshest and strongest, all you will want is money, and that you shan't want, if you accede to the suggestion I have just made. You will store

your mind in experience, you will see all sorts and varieties of men, and as you have nothing particular to bind you to England, you could thoroughly enjoy your freedom, and return with a valuable stock of ideas for the future benefit of the British reading public. *Allez toujours, la jeunesse!* which, under its familiar translation of 'Go it while you're young!' is the best advice I can give you, George, my dear boy. During your absence, you will have shaken off all your old associations, and who knows but that the great bashaw, your step-father, may clasp you to his bosom, and leave all his acres to his dearly-beloved step-son, G. D.? Only one thing! You must not forget Harry, and you must not forget me! If all works right, you will find us very differently situated from what you have ever known us, and you won't be ashamed to recognize us as friends. You would laugh if you could see me now, emphatically a 'City man,' wearing Oxford-mixture trousers and carrying a shabby fat umbrella, which is an infallible sign of wealth, eating chops in the middle of the day, solemnly rebuking my young clerks for late attendance at the office, and comporting myself generally with the greatest gravity and decorum. And to think that we once used to 'back the caster,' and have, in our time, held point, quint, and quatorze. Tell it not in Gath! 'By advices last received, the produce of the mines has been twenty-two thousand oitavas, the gain whereof is, &c. &c.' That's the style now!

"Harriet is well, and, as ever, my right hand. To see her at work over the books at night, one would think she had been born in the Brazils, and had never heard of anything but silver mines. She sends kindest regards, and is fully of my opinion as to the expediency of your staying away from London. No news of Deane; but that does not surprise me. His association with us was entirely one of concurrence, and he always talked of himself as a wanderer—a bird of passage. I suppose he did not give you any hint of his probable movements on the day of the dinner, when I had the ill-luck to offend him by not coming? No one ever knew where he lived, or how, so I can't make any inquiries. However, it's very little matter.

"And now I must make an end of this long story. Good-bye

my dear George. All sorts of luck, and jollity, and happiness attend you, but in the enjoyment of them all don't forget the pecuniary proposition I have made to you, and think sometimes kindly of

"Your sincere
"STEWART ROUTH."

A little roll of paper had dropped from the letter when George opened it. He picked it up, and found two Bank-of-England notes for twenty pounds, and one for ten pounds.

It is no discredit to George Dallas to avow that when he had finished the perusal of this quaint epistle, and when he looked at its enclosure, he had a swelling in his throat, a quivering in the muscles of his mouth, and thick heavy tears in his eyes. He was very young, you see, and very impressionable, swaying hither and thither with the wind and the stream, unstable as water, and with very little power of adhering to any determination, however right and laudable it seemed at the first blush. There are few of us—in early youth, at all events, let us trust—who are so clear-headed, and far-seeing, and right-hearted, as to be able to do exactly what Duty prescribes to us—the shutting out all promptings of inclination! Depend upon it the good boys in the children's story-books, those juvenile patterns who went unwaveringly to the Sunday-school, shutting their eyes to the queen-cakes and toffy so temptingly displayed on the road-side, and who were adamant in the matter of telling a fib, though by so doing they might have saved their schoolfellow a flogging—depend upon it they turned out, for the most part, very bad men, who robbed the orphans and ground the faces of the widows. George Dallas was but a man, very warm-hearted, very impressionable, and when he read Stewart Routh's letter he repented of his harshness to his friend, and accused himself of having been precipitate and ungenerous. Here was the blackleg, the sharper, the gambler, actually returning some of his legitimate winnings, and placing his purse at his acquaintance's disposal, while his step-father—But then that would not bear thinking about! Besides, his step-father was Clare's uncle; no kindness of Routh's would ever enable him,

George, to make progress in that direction, and therefore—And yet it was deuced kind in Routh to be so thoughtful. The money came so opportunely, too, just when, what with his Hague excursion and his purchases, he had spent the balance of the sum derived from the sale of the bracelet, and it would have been scarcely decent to ask for an advance from the *Mercury* office or the *Piccadilly* people. But it was a great thing that Routh advised him to keep away from England for a time—a corroboration, too, of Routh's statement that he was going into a different line of life—for of course with his new views an intimacy with Routh would be impossible, whereas, he could now let it drop quietly. He would accept the money so kindly sent him, and he would do the account of the herring fishery for the *Mercury*, and he would get on with the serial story for the *Piccadilly*, and—Well, he would remain where he was, and see what turned up. The quiet, easy-going, dreamy life suited George to a nicety; and if he had been a little older, and had never seen Clare Carruthers, he might, on very little provocation, have accepted the Dutch *far niente* as the realization of human bliss.

So, having to remain in Holland for some few days longer, and needing some money for immediate spending, George Dallas bethought him of his old friend, Mr Schaub, and strolled to the Muiderstraat in search of him. He found the old gentleman seated behind his counter, bending over an enormous volume in the Hebrew character, over the top of which he glared through the silver-rimmed spectacles at his visitor with anything but an inviting glance. When, however, he recognized George, which he did comparatively quickly, his forbidding look relaxed, he put down the book, and began nodding in a galvanized manner, rubbing the palms of his hands together, and showing the few fangs left in his mouth.

"Vat! Vart—Paul Vart! you here still? Wass you not back gone to your own land, Vart? You do no more vairks, Vart, you vaste your time in Amsterdam, Vart—Paul Vart!"

"No; not that," said George, laughing; "I have not gone home, certainly, but I've not lost my time. I've been seeing to your country and studying character. I've been to the Hague."

"Ja, ja! the Hague! and, like your countrymen, you have bought their die Japans, die dogues, and punch-bowls. Ja, ja!"

George admitted the fact as to japan-ware and china dogs, but denied the punch-bowls.

"Ja, ja!" groaned Mr Schaub; "and here in dis house I could have sold you straight same, de straight same, and you save your money for journey to Hague."

"Well, I haven't saved the money," said George with a laugh, "but I dare say I shall be able to make something of what I saw there. You'll be pleased to hear I am going to write a story for the *Piccadilly*—they've engaged me."

"Wass Peek-a-teelies wass goot, ver goot," said Mr Schaub; "better as *Mercury*—bigger, higher, more stand!"

"Ah! but you mustn't run down the *Mercury*, either. They've asked me to write a description of the sailing of your herring-fleet. So I must stop here for a few days, and I want you to change me a Bank-of-England note."

"Ja, ja! with pleasure! Wass always likes dis Bank-of-England notes; ist goot, and clean, and so better as dirty Austrich Prussich money. Ah! he is not the same as I give you other day! He is quite new and clean for twenty pounds! Ja, ja!" he added, after holding the note up to the light, "his vater-mark is raight! A. F. ! Vot is A. F., 17 April? Ah, you don't know! You don't become it from A. F. ? Course not! Vell, vell, let me see die course of 'Change—denn I put him into my leetle stock von English bank-note!"

The old man took up a newspaper that lay on the counter before him and consulted it, made a rapid calculation on a piece of paper, and was about to turn round towards the drawer where, as George remembered, he kept his cash-box, when he stopped, handed George the pen from behind his ear, dipped it into the ink, and said:

"Vell, just write his name, Vart—Paul Vart, on his back—m-ja? And his date of month. So! Vart—Paul Vart!—m-ja! ist goot. Here's die guldens."

George Dallas swept the gold pieces into his pocket, nodded to the old man, and left the shop. Mr Schaub carefully locked away the note, made an entry of its number and amount in his ledger, and resumed his reading.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DILEMMA.

SOUTH MOLTON-STREET had apparently a strong attraction for Mr James Swain. Perhaps he found it a profitable and productive situation in point of odd and early jobs, perhaps he had some less professional reason for frequenting it. However that may be, the fact existed that no day passed without his tousled head and imperfectly clad form making their appearance in the street two or three times between dawn and dark. He would hang about the precincts of the house in which Routh and Harriet lodged, and evinced an extraordinary preference for the archway in the vicinity as a dining-room. He might have been seen at irregular hours devouring saveloys, polonies, or, when jobs odd or even were not plentiful, hunches of bread and cheese, within the shelter of the archway, in the most unsophisticated attitudes, and with great apparent enjoyment. Mr James Swain's face was not free from the underlying expression of care and anxiety which is always to be found by the careful observer in the countenance of the London street-boy, but it had more than the usual complement of sauciness, cunning, readiness, and impudence.

The boy had quite an attraction for Mrs Routh, who would smile at him when she passed him in the street, nod pleasantly to him occasionally from her window, when his business or pleasure led him to lounge past the house before she had left her bedroom of a morning, and who frequently sent him of errands, for the doing of which she rewarded him with a liberality which appeared to him astounding munificence. Mr James Swain was of a temperament to feel kindness, neglected street-boy though he was, and he had been wonderfully impressed by the womanly compassion which had spoken to him in Harriet's gentle tones on the morning of their first meeting, and had looked out of all the trouble and foreboding in her blue eyes. His interest in the Routh household, however, antedated that event, and received not only an additional access, but a fresh colouring from it, and an acute observer, supposing one

to exist for whom so mean a matter as the mental condition of a street-boy, very vulgar indeed, and without a particle of sentimental interest about him, should possess any attraction, would have discerned that a struggle of some sort was going on in the mind of the frequenter of South Molton-street, and seeker of odd jobs.

Routh, also, was not without interest for Jim Swain. Perhaps he watched him even more closely than he watched Harriet, but if he did, it was with totally different feelings. Routh had considerable powers of self-command, and could always be civil and apparently good-tempered, no matter what his real humour might be, when it accorded with his interests to be so. But he was not a man to treat inferiors with courtesy, or to refrain from rudeness and brutality where they were safe, and unlikely to do him any discredit. Consequently, servants and other recipients of the outpourings of his temper hated him with a vivid cordiality. Jim, the street-boy, had been employed by him occasionally, and had formed, apart from certain other knowledge he had gained concerning Mr Stewart Routh, the worst opinion of that gentleman's disposition and character.

"He's a bad 'un, anyhow," the boy muttered, as he watched Mr Routh letting himself into the house he inhabited with his latch-key, having previously taken a handful of letters from the postman at the door. "An ill-lookin' dog, too. Scowled at the letters as if he was a-goin' to eat 'em. P'raps they're love letters. I shouldn't wonder, now, as the lady is a pinin' for some 'un else, and he's jealous, and gets hold on all the letters to catch her out."

This bright idea, which Jim Swain derived from his habitual reading of penny romances, devoted to the delineation of the tender passion, afforded him considerable gratification, and he had already consumed several minutes and a cold sausage while turning it over in his mind, when Harriet Routh came out of the house, and passed him, as he leaned against the wall under the archway. She was very pale and quite absorbed in thought, so that, though the lad respectfully pulled a tuft of his tousled hair in salutation, she did not perceive his presence.

"She's not like the same woman," mused Mr James Swain;

"she's gone as white as anything ; looks just as if she'd had to git her own livin' for ever so long, and found it precious hard to git, too. If he's jealous of her, and a ill treatin' of her, blowed if I won't peach ! No, no, I won't, though, leastways not yet, 'cause I can't without lettin' out on myself too ; but," said the boy with a long look which softened the cunning of his face strangely, "I would like to know as she was happier than I think she is."

In the wide city of London there was not another human being to feel any such wish in connection with Harriet Routh. She was quite alone. She had so willed it, and circumstances had aided her inclination and her resolve. In the life which her husband had adopted, and she had accepted, intimacies, friendships, were impossible. The only relation between them and their kind was the relation between the swindler and his dupes, always a merely "business" connection, and generally very brief in its duration. Harriet had not a female friend in the world. Perhaps she would not have had one under any circumstances ; she was not a woman to cherish sentiment ; the one love of her life was an overmastering passion, which had absorbed all lesser feelings ; and the secretiveness and reserve, which were large elements in her moral nature, would have been inimical to such association, which, above all, needs gushingness for its satisfactory development. Her husband's male friends saw her seldom, and were not observant or interested in the health, spirits, or appearance of any but themselves ; so there was no one but the street-boy to note the change that had passed upon her. Routh, indeed, observed it, with the bitter, selfish impatience of his character, and silently resented it. But only silently ; he made no comment, and Harriet, for the first time, failed to interpret his feelings.

She *was* changed. Changed in face, in manner, in voice, in the daily habits of her life. The light had faded from her blue eyes, and with it their colour had paled. Her cheek had lost its roundness, and there was something set and stony in her face. It had been calm, now it was rigid. Her voice, still low and refined, was no longer musical, and her words were rare. Personal habits are tenacious, and rarely yield, even to strong mental excitement, or under the pressure of anxious care, and Harriet, always neat and

careful in her simple dress, was neat and careful still. But a close observer would have marked a change even in this respect. She cared for her looks no longer. An ill-assorted ribbon, or ill-chosen colour, would once have been impossible to Harriet Routh; but it was all the same to her now. What were the symptoms of the moral change that had passed upon her as distinctly as the physical? They were rather those of intensification than of alteration. Her determination had assumed a sternness which had not before marked it, her identification of herself with Routh had become more than ever complete. The intensity of the passion with which she loved him was hardly capable of increase, but its quiet was gone. The pliable ease, the good-fellowship, the frank equality of their companionship had departed; and though her attention to his interests, her participation in his schemes, were as active and unceasing as ever, they were no longer spontaneous, they were the result of courageous and determined effort, sustained as only a woman can sustain effort which costs her acute and unrelenting suffering. She had been much alone of late. Routh had been much and profitably occupied. The affairs of the new company were progressing favourably, and Routh's visits to Flinders were frequent and well received. He had other things of the sort on hand, and his finances were in a flourishing condition. He was on the road to success, after the fashion of modern successes, and if his luck did not change, all the respectability which attaches to a fortunate speculation was on the cards for Stewart Routh. No restoration to his former place was possible, indeed; but Routh cared nothing for that, would, perhaps, not have accepted such a restoration had it been within his reach. Struggle, scheming, shifts, and the excitement consequent thereon, were essential to him now; he liked them; the only game he could play with any relish was a desperate one. To what extent he had played it was known only to himself and Harriet, and he was beginning to be afraid of his confederate. Not afraid of her trustworthiness, of her fidelity, of her staunch and unshrinking devotion; Stewart Routh was just as confident, as of the fact of his existence, that his wife would cheerfully have given her life for him, as she gave it to him, but the man's nature was essentially

base, and the misused strength, the perverted nobility of hers crushed and frightened him. He had not felt it so much while they were very poor, while all their schemes and shifts were on a small scale, while his every-day comforts depended on her active management and unfailing forethought. But now, when he had played for a great stake and won it, when a larger career was open before him—a career from which he felt she would shrink, and into which he could never hope to force her—he grew desperately afraid of Harriet. Desperately tired of her also. He was a clever man, but she was cleverer than he. He was a man of strong passions, ungovernable, save by the master-passion, interest. She had but one, love; but it was stronger than all his put together, and told to do their worst, and his shallow nature shrank from the unknown depths of hers. She loved him so entirely that there had never been a question of rule between them; but Routh was a wise man in his way, and he knew in his heart he could rule Harriet only by love, and love which was perfectly genuine and true, should the time ever come in which a distant separation of opinion and will between them should make it necessary for him to try. But he had a clear appreciation of his wife's intellect also, and he knew thoroughly well that he could not deceive her with any counterfeit presentment—the love which should rule her must be real. This was precisely what he had not to produce when required. He had loved her after his fashion for so long that he was rather surprised by his own constancy; but it would have been difficult for Stewart Routh to go on loving any one but himself always, and Harriet was so much superior to him in strength, firmness, and disinterestedness, that her very superiority was an element of destruction for the love of such a man as he.

In all that concerned the business of Stewart Routh's life, Harriet's conduct was still the same as before—she was still industrious and invaluable to him. But the occupations which had filled her leisure hours were all neglected now, the lonely time was no more lightened by the pursuits which her early education and her natural tastes had endeared and rendered habitual to her. One of two moods now possessed her, either uncontrollable restlessness or absorbed brooding. She would start off, when Routh had left

her, and walk for hours through the crowded thoroughfares, out into the suburbs of London, or up and down the most distant and less frequented parts of the Parks, returning home weary and foot-sore, but with the torturing sense of restlessness unsubdued. Or, when she was alone, she would sit for hours, not in a selected position of comfort, but anywhere, on the first seat that came in her way, her head drooping, her eyes fixed and vacant, her hands closely clasped and lying in her lap, her fair low brow contracted by a stern and painful frown. From either of these two moods she rarely varied; and even in Routh's presence, one or the other would master her at times. It chanced that on the day when Jim Swain had seen Routh return to his lodgings, and take some letters from the postman, the restless fit had come very strongly upon Harriet, and she had gone to her room to dress herself for walking, when Routh unexpectedly returned. He went into the sitting-room, and concluding she would be down-stairs presently, waited for her, reading the letters in his hand, frowningly the while. But Harriet had passed quietly down the stairs and gone out, without re-entering the sitting-room, and Routh waited in vain. At length he sought her in her room, and not finding her, he angrily rang the bell, and asked the servant if she knew anything about her. She did not, and Routh dismissed her, and began to stride about the room, uttering very uncalled-for objurgations on women who were never in the way when they were wanted. As he passed the window, his eye fell upon Jim Swain tranquilly eating bread and cheese, as he leaned against the opposite railings. Routh looked at him again more closely, and again; finally, he took up his hat, went down-stairs, out of the door, and across the street, close up to the boy.

"Hollo, you sir!" he addressed him roughly. "What are you doing here?"

Mr James Swain eyed his questioner with no pleasant or grateful expression of countenance, and replied, curtly:

"Nothin'!"

"What brings you here, then?" continued Routh.

"I ain't a doin' you any harm, am I?" answered the boy, all his native impudence brought out in a moment by the overbearing

manner of Routh. "It ain't your street, I believe, nor yet your archway, as I knows on; and if I chooses to odd job on this here lay, I don't hurt *you*, do I?"

The saucy manner of the lad did not anger Routh; he hardly seemed to notice it, but appeared to be entirely possessed by some struggling remembrance not of a pleasing kind, if his expression afforded any correct clue to it.

"Have you seen a lady come out of No. 60 since you have been about here?" he asked, passing by the boy's saucy remarks as if he had not heard them.

"Yes, I have. I saw the lady as lives there, not two minutes after you came in. She went that way." And he pointed down the street.

"Had she anything in her hand? Did she look as if she was going for a walk, or out shopping?"

"She hadn't no basket or bag, and she warn't partickler dressed; not as nice as she's dressed sometimes. *I should say,*" continued Mr Jim Swain, with an air of wisdom and decision, "as she was going for a constitootional, all by herself, and not to shop nor nothin'."

Routh's attention had wandered from the boy's words, and was fixed upon his face.

"Have I ever seen you before?" he asked him, abruptly.

A sudden rush of colour dyed Mr James Swain's face, even through the varnish of dirt which hid its surface, as he replied, with a little less than his customary boldness:

"Yes, sir, you've seen me, though in course you ain't likely to remember it. You've giv' me many a penny, and a sixpence too, and the lady."

Again Routh looked steadily, but covertly, at him under his thick brows. He was evidently eager to ask him some question, but he refrained, restrained by some powerful motive. Jim looked uneasily up and down the street, moved his feet about restlessly, turned his ragged pockets inside out, letting loose a multitude of dirty crumbs, and displayed a fidgety inclination to get away from South Molton-street.

"Well," said Routh, rousing himself from his abstraction,

"we're going to move next week, and you can come and do the odd jobs for us, if you like."

"Thankee, sir," said Jim, who was very respectful now, and touched his ragged cap as if he had quite altered his opinion of the speaker. "What day shall I come, sir?"

"I don't exactly know," said Routh; "you can call and ask the lady." And then he gave the lad a shilling, to Jim Swain's intense surprise, and, crossing the street, once more let himself in at the door of No. 60. Having reached the sitting-room, Stewart Routh sat down by the window and fell into a fit of musing as deep as those in which Harriet Routh passed hours away.

Mr James Swain went briskly down the street, pleasantly conscious that the unexpected windfall of the shilling had released him from the labours of his calling for the day, and determined to proceed at once to lay it out to the greatest advantage.

"Wotever is he up to *now*?" Thus ran the street-boy's thoughts. "I'm sure he's jealous, or he wouldn't be coming home unexpected, and a watchin' of her like that. Ain't he a brute just? And a willin' too? Well, I'm glad I ain't *sure*—I'm very glad I ain't *sure*."

With this enigmatical phrase, Mr James Swain abandoned his mental colloquy, and directed his thoughts to more immediately personal matters.

Routh was still sitting by the window when Harriet returned, and with the first glance at his face she saw that something new had occurred.

"I did not expect you home until six o'clock," she said, as she laid aside her bonnet, and stood by his side, laying her hand tenderly upon his shoulder.

"No," he returned; "I came home to get some papers for Flinders about the Tunbridge Canal business; but you have them, Harry, and you were out."

"Well," she said, calmly, looking at him with questioning eyes. "What has happened, Stewart?"

"This," he returned, very slowly, and without meeting her gaze. "As I came in I met the postman with this letter. Read it, and tell me what is to be done."

She sat down close beside him, and took the letter he held towards her. It was addressed to George Dallas, to the care of Routh, and it was, in fact, the letter which Mr Carruthers had written to his step-son prior to his departure from Poynings. As Harriet read, her right hand sought her husband's, and held it tightly. The old look of quiet resolution, the old expression of confident resource, came into her face. She read the paper twice before she spoke.

"Stewart," she said, "this is only another head of the hydra, and we had counted them, had we not? What we have to decide is, whether this letter shall be suppressed, or whether it must be forwarded to George Dallas. At first sight, I see no possibility of suppressing it without infinite danger, but this is only first sight, and we may see more clearly afterwards."

"Dallas has never said anything to you about letters from his mother, has he?" asked Routh.

"No," replied Harriet, "not since his second letter, when he said he supposed she was testing his repentance and good conduct, and that he would not write until he could give her some proof of both."

"Get the old woman's letter, and let us read it again."

Harriet went to her writing-table, opened a drawer, and took a paper from its recesses. It was the letter which Mrs Brookes had written to George Dallas. The two read it carefully, and Harriet spoke first.

"We can only conjecture the meaning of this, Stewart; but, as I make it out, it means that the proceedings at the—the inquest"—she paused almost imperceptibly, then went on, in a steady tone—"awakened his mother's fears. It was lucky he told us the story of his mother's anxiety about his coat, or we should have failed to catch the clue. Now I read the riddle thus: Mrs Carruthers has been dangerously ill in consequence of the shock of the discovery, but she has not betrayed her knowledge or suspicions. A good deal of time has been gained, and under any circumstances that is a priceless advantage. The question now is, can any more time be gained? Can George Dallas be kept in ignorance of the appearances against him any longer? The sup-

pression of the old woman's letter was an easy matter. It is ill-written, you see, as servants' letters usually are, indistinctly addressed, and generally unimportant. But a letter written by Mr Carruthers of Poynings is quite another matter. It must come out, some time or other, that it was not received, and he is precisely the man to investigate the matter to the utmost. No, no, the letter must be sent to Dallas."

She spoke firmly, but her eyes were dreamy and distant. Routh knew their expression, and that some expedient, some resolve, was shaping itself in her mind. He sat quite silent until she spoke again.

"The first thing we have to do is to ascertain with all possible exactitude the real condition of Mrs Carruthers, where she is at present, and whether we are right in supposing her fears were excited. This letter is not calculated to bring George home, I think. Of course, if it had reached him before they left Poynings, he would have come home at once ; but, see, Mr Carruthers writes on the 10th, and says they are to start on the 11th. This is the 13th. What is the post-mark ?"

"Dover," said Routh, handing her the envelope.

"Posted after they left England, no doubt," said Harriet. "Stewart, there is just one thing to be done. Let us move from this at once. It is only doing so a little sooner than we had intended. Then, if we decide on suppressing the letter, its loss may be accounted for, even to the satisfaction of Mr Carruthers. This, while we consider what must be done."

"Yes," said Routh, "I think that will be wise ; but I do not see my way out of the danger of his return, if he returns when he has received the letter. He will go down to Amherst at once, and will discover the suspicion, and at once take steps to clear himself of it."

"Perhaps so," said Harriet, and her face darkened, "but he may not find that so easy. I hope he will not put himself into the danger ; but if he does—" She paused, and looked thoughtfully into her husband's face, while a quick shudder crept over her. He saw the look in her eyes, he felt the quiver in her hand, and frowned darkly.

"Don't take to melodrama, Harriet, it's so unlike you, and doesn't suit you. Besides, it's too late in the day for that kind of thing now."

She took no notice of the ungracious speech, but still stood looking thoughtfully at him. He rose, letting her hand drop from his shoulder, and walked up and down the room.

"Stewart," she said gently, "you must not be impatient with me if I am not as ready of resource as I was. However, I think I see what ought to be done in this emergency, and I am quite sure I can do it. I will go to Amherst, find out the true state of things there, see the old woman at Poynings, who will gladly receive me as a friend of George Dallas; and then, and then only, can we decide whether this letter is to reach him or not."

"By Jove, Harry, that's a splendid idea!" said Routh; "and there can't be any risk in it, for Dallas would take your doing it as the greatest kindness. *You* not so ready of resource as you were? You're more so, my girl—you're more so."

There was a little wonder in the look she turned upon him, a little surprise at the lightness of his tone, but not a ray of the pleasure which his perverted praise had once given her.

"This is the best thing to do," she said, gravely, "and I will do it at once. I will go to-morrow morning."

"And I will get our traps moved, and put up at the Tavistock till you come back. You can pack this evening, I suppose, Harry?"

"O yes," she answered. "I shall be glad of the occupation."

"And you'll do it more easily without me," said Routh, whom no crisis of events, however serious, could render indifferent to his individual comforts, and to whom the confusion of packing was an image of horror and disgust; "so I shall dine out, and leave you to your own devices. Here, you had better lock these up." He took the letters from a table on which she had laid them as she spoke, and held them towards her.

She drew a step nearer to him, took the papers from his hand; then suddenly let them drop upon the floor, and flung her arms wildly round Routh's neck.

"Harriet, Harriet," he said, "what's this?" as he strove to lift her face which she held pressed against his breast with terrible

force. She answered him with a groan—a groan so full of anguish, that his callousness was not proof against it.

"My love, my darling, my brave girl, don't, don't!" was all he could say, as he bent his head over her and held her tightly to him. For several moments she stood thus; then she lifted her white face, put up her hands, and drew his face down to hers, kissed him with kisses which thrilled him with an unknown sense of fear and doom, and, instantly releasing, left him.

Mr James Swain got the promised odd job in South Molton-street sooner than he had expected it; for, calling at No. 60, according to Mr Routh's instructions, to ask the lady when his services would be required, he was informed that she had gone away, and he was to carry down the boxes to be conveyed to their destination in the van then standing at the door. Jim performed his duty with a perturbed spirit.

"Gone away, is she?" he said over and over again. "Now I should like to know where she's gone, and wot for. I hope he ain't be up to nothin' agin her; but I don't trust him, and I ain't a goin' to lose sight of him for longer than I can help, if I knows it, until she's safe back *somewheres*."

"That funeral is largely attended for a small town," said Harriet Routh to the waiter at the inn at Amherst, who was laying the cloth for her dinner. She was sitting by a window on the ground-floor, and idly watching the decorous procession as it passed along the main street, to the huge admiration of gaping boys and gossiping nursemaids.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the man, gladly seizing the opportunity of approaching the window and having a peep on his own account. "He was very much respected, was old Mr Evans; no one in the town more so. He gave the best of measures, and used the best of mater'als; and a charitabler man, nor a constanter at meetin', though uncommon deaf latterly, ain't in Amherst."

Harriet looked inquiringly at the speaker.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, you're a stranger, of course, and don't know nothin' about poor old Evans. He were a tailor, ma'am, at Amherst, man and boy, for fifty year and more, and got

a deal of custom, which they do say no tailor here won't have for the future, seeing as they can't compete with the Sydenham suits."

Harriet made no comment upon the man's little discourse, and he left the room. When she was alone, she smiled a smile not good to see, and said, half aloud :

"I remember how they used to talk about Providence and providential interventions on behalf of the good, long ago, when I used to fancy I believed in Providence, and when I certainly did believe in the existence of the good. I wonder what these people would call *this*? If it is a providential intervention, the theory has two sides."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE DEFENSIVE.

THE announcement of a lady who wished to see Mrs Brookes caused the faithful old woman no particular emotion. She was well known and much respected among the neighbours of Poynings, in the humbler sense, and visits from several of their number were ordinary events enough in her life. The announcement found her, not in her own room, but in her mistress's, where she had replaced the portrait of George, and was sitting looking at it with dim eyes and clasped hands. The time had been long in rolling over her weary old head ; for though she had passed the period of life in which feeling is very keen, and sorrow has power to torture, and constancy to last, Mrs Brookes had no other objects to divide her thoughts with Mrs Carruthers and her son ; and day by day the old woman had brooded upon the new trouble which had come to those whom she loved so well. Perplexity mingled with her grief, for she knew not what to think. She had stoutly denied the possibility of George's guilt, in the memorable dialogue which had been the last she had held with his mother ; but the faint and fluttering hope she entertained was very different from the confidence she expressed ; and now, in the solitude and silence

of the great house, in the absence of the absorbing demand which Mrs Carruthers's condition had made upon all her attention and self-command, her stout old heart sank within her. His mother was gone away from all the scenes and associations which had come to have a terrible meaning. Would she ever return? Ellen hardly knew how she wished to answer this question. It were better and happier perhaps that she never did, that her tired heart should drowsily beat itself to rest in a strange country, and lie hidden under another soil than that her son had stained with blood. Had he done this thing? What of him? Where was he? The orderly house, the well-regulated household, needed little of the old housekeeper's supervision. The absence of the family made little difference. No cleaning-days interrupted the decorous order of things in an establishment in which it would have savoured of indecorum to suppose that the rule of absolute cleanliness was ever superseded. Alterations and repairs were innovating interruptions altogether incompatible with Poynings; and, in fact, there was little or nothing to break the dead level to which old Ellen had looked forward as that of her days when she should be left alone in the stately house, and which had begun to realize itself at once.

Dixon had accompanied her mistress to foreign parts; and it was Martha, housemaid, who told Mrs Brookes that a lady, who had been shown into her own room, wanted to see her.

"Which, I dare say, she's come after Susan's character," remarked Martha, parenthetically, "for she ain't this side Hamherst, I know."

Mrs Brookes rose from the chair that she had placed opposite George's picture, took off her spectacles, from which she wiped a suspicious moisture, placed them carefully in her pocket, arranged her cap and shawl, and, without vouchsafing any answer to the speculations of Martha, she took her way slowly to the housekeeper's room. As she crossed the hall she saw a fly standing at the open door; and the driver, a man from Page's, touched his hat to her as she passed.

"I don't know this lady," she thought. "Nobody about here takes a fly to come to Poynings."

Her visitor was seated on the heavy horsehair sofa, which in the winter flanked the fire, but was now drawn close under the window through which George had entered on that memorable night, which came freshly into the memory of the old woman at that moment. As she looked sharply at the figure which rose to greet her, Mrs Brookes felt in a moment that she was in the presence of a woman with some purpose.

The fixedness of Harriet Routh's face, the effort of a smile—for loneliness told upon her nerves now with rapidity and power—a something forced and painful in her voice, aroused an instinctive fear in Mrs Brookes, and put her on her guard. She made a stiff bow and a movement with her body, which, when she was younger, would have been a curtsey, but was now only a duck, and asked her visitor's pleasure.

"I have called upon you, Mrs Brookes," said Harriet, in a sweet and winning tone, "in consequence of a paragraph which I have seen in a newspaper."

It was an unfortunate beginning, for it set the old nurse instantly on her guard by arousing her suspicions, and making her resolve that the blue-eyed, sweet-spoken lady, who looked as if she had a purpose, should get nothing out of her.

"Indeed," she replied, very stiffly. "Please to sit down, ma'am."

Harriet resumed her seat, and began to speak rather quickly. Mrs Brookes looked at her steadily, immovably, having put on her spectacles for the purpose, but gave her neither encouragement nor assistance by so much as a sound or a nod.

"I am Mrs Routh," she said, "and a friend of Mr George Dallas, Mrs Carruthers's son. It is on his account and for his sake I have come here."

Mrs Brookes's black-mittened hands pressed each other more closely as they lay clasped together in her lap, but she made no sign.

"I am aware of the unfortunate circumstances which keep Mr Dallas and his mother apart," continued Harriet, who maintained a watch upon the old woman as steady as her own, but more

covert ; "and I am afraid he will be much distressed and alarmed if this reaches him without any preparation."

She held out a newspaper as she spoke—a newspaper she had procured at the inn at Amherst, and pointed to the paragraph which recorded the departure of Mr and Mrs Carruthers of Poyning and suite for the Continent ; and, in addition, the regret with which "we" had learned that the departure in question had been occasioned by the dangerous illness of Mrs Carruthers. Mrs Brookes was immensely relieved, but not altogether reassured. She had a vague idea that the business of detection was sometimes intrusted to women, and she still had her doubts of the blue-eyed, sweet-spoken lady whose face indicated a purpose, without betraying it.

"Mr Dallas knows of his mother's illness," said Mrs Brookes. "He will not hear of it first from any newspaper."

"Indeed," said Harriet. "I am glad to know that. I am much relieved. Mr Dallas is so intimate with Mr Routh, my husband, and we are so much attached to him, that anything which is of importance to him concerns us. I am on my way to Dover, and I thought I would turn out of it a little to inquire into this matter."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Mrs Brookes, still unsoftened. "May I ask if you have left your house in London ?"

"We have for the present," replied Harriet ; "indeed, I don't think we shall return there."

Mrs Brookes looked confused and distressed.

"Excuse me," she said, after an awkward pause, "if I appear at all impertinent. I am George Dallas's old nurse, and more his mother's friend than her servant, and I can't be particular about other people when they are concerned. George Dallas is not as welcome here as he ought to be in his mother's house ; you say you know that. If you really are Mrs Routh, you ought to know more about him than that—more, in fact, than I do."

"Certainly," said Harriet, with unchanged sweetness of tone, and just the least gleam of colour in her cheek, showing that she was approaching her object. "I do know a great deal more about George Dallas than you do, if, as I conclude from your words,

nothing has been heard of him since his last visit to his mother."

She paused very slightly, but Mrs Brookes did not utter a word.

"You are quite right to be cautious, Mrs Brookes ; in such a delicate family matter as this, caution is most essential. Poor George has been so foolish, that he has laid himself open to being harmed either by enemies or injudicious friends ; but I assure you, Mrs Brookes, I am neither. I really am Mrs Routh, and I am quite in George's confidence, and am here solely with the purpose of saving him any trouble or anxiety I can."

"Where is he?" asked the old woman, suddenly, as if the question were forced upon her.

"He is at Amsterdam, in Holland," replied Harriet, in a frank tone, and changing her seat for one beside Mrs Brookes, as she spoke ; "here are several letters from him. See," and she drew half a dozen sheets of foreign paper, closely written over, from her pocket, and put them into the old woman's hands. She beheld the letters with mingled pleasure and avoidance : they could not answer the question which tormented her, but they relieved her misgivings about her visitor. She felt assured now that she really was speaking to Mrs Routh, and that the object of her visit was one of kindness to George. The letters were in his well-known hand ; the thin paper and the postmarks satisfied her that they came from abroad. He was still out of the country, then ; so far there was safety, but she must be cautious still concerning him. What if she could make Harriet the unconscious bearer of a further warning to him—a warning carefully contrived so that none but he should know its meaning, and he should understand it thoroughly? She would try. She had thought all this while she turned the letters over in her hands ; then she returned them to Harriet, and said :

"Thank you, ma'am. I see these are from Master George, and it's plain he has great confidence in you. He never answered a letter I sent him : it went to your house."

"All communications for him are addressed to Mr Routh," said Harriet, "and forwarded at once."

"Well, ma'am, he never told me where he had gone to, or

wrote a letter but one to his mother ; and when that came, she was too ill to read it, or know anything about it."

"Indeed," said Harriet, in a tone of commiseration ; "she must have been taken ill just after he saw her, then?"

"She was," returned Mrs Brookes, emphatically, "and you, ma'am, know, no doubt, why she saw him, and can understand that his conduct caused her illness."

"Not exactly that," said Harriet. "He told me all that had passed, and described his mother as full of forgiveness and hope, and he even said how well and handsome he thought her looking. George amuses us very much by constantly talking of his mother's beauty ; he will be all the more distressed when he hears of her illness, now, and I really think, Mrs Brookes, it cannot be quite fair to impute it to his conduct."

"It was just that, and nothing else," said the old woman ; and her voice shook as she spoke, though she strove to control it. "It was, indeed, ma'am, and you must tell him the truth, without softening it, or making it any better. Tell him that she nearly died of the knowledge of his conduct, and that her mind is weakened, and her memory gone."

"Her memory gone !" exclaimed Harriet. "You don't mean to say it is so bad as that?"

"I do, indeed," said Mrs Brookes. "And will you tell him exactly what I tell you? Tell him that his mother has forgotten all that led to her illness, all the fear and suspense she underwent. Of course she was frightened at what she had to do, and in suspense until it was done ; but I am sure she has not forgotten him, and if he were to see her, or even be mentioned to her suddenly, it might have the worst effect. Be sure to tell him this, and that the only thing he can do to atone for the past in any way is to keep out of his mother's sight. He knows some of this already, for I wrote to him, and he knows from Mr Carruthers that his mother is gone away."

"From Mr Carruthers?" said Harriet, in a tone of admirably simulated surprise ; "does *he* ever communicate with George?"

"My master is a very just man," replied Mrs Brookes, in a stately tone, "and he would not allow his wife's son to be kept

in ignorance of his mother's danger. I am sure he will send for him, wherever he may be, if there is no chance of her recovery. I don't say he would send for him sooner."

"Of course Mr Carruthers has no idea of the cause of Mrs Carruthers's illness?"

"No, no; it was her fear of his finding out that George had been here, and what for, that brought it on; but, of course, he did not suspect anything."

"It is very strange," said Harriet, musingly; "she seems to have borne all this business perfectly well at the time, and given way completely afterwards. It must have surprised *you* very much, Mrs Brookes, though, no doubt, you understand your mistress's constitution."

"Yes," replied the old woman, dryly, and ignoring the beginning of the sentence, "I understand my mistress's constitution."

"I will give your message to Mr Dallas," said Harriet, rising, "and I had better leave you our temporary address, unless, indeed, you would prefer writing to Mr Dallas direct."

"No," said Mrs Brookes, "I have nothing to say. When news of his mother comes from abroad, I will send it to you."

The old woman was constrained and miserable in her visitor's presence, but the hospitality of Poynings must be vindicated; and she felt, besides, that Mrs Carruthers would, in other days, have been glad of an opportunity of being kind to any one who had been kind to George. So she pressed Harriet to take some refreshment and to prolong her visit. But Harriet would not touch bread or wine in the house, and told Mrs Brookes she must return to Amherst immediately, to catch the train for Dover. "I dined at the inn in the town," she said, in explanation of her refusal, "as I had to wait awhile before I could get a fly."

"I hope they made you comfortable, ma'am," said Mrs Brookes, who had resumed, when their interview assumed a commonplace complexion, her head-servant-like manner. "Page's people are obliging, and it is a respectable house."

"Very much so indeed," returned Harriet, carelessly. "The town seems a clean dull sort of place. I had a funeral to look at

while I waited for my dinner, and the waiter entertained me with the biography of the deceased."

"I had not heard of a death at Amherst," said Mrs Brookes, primly. She did not like the flippant tone in which her visitor spoke. "The servants have not been in the town this week."

"An estimable person—one Evans, a tailor, I believe; so the waiter said," Harriet returned, still more carelessly, as she took up her parasol and railway-guide, glanced covertly at the old woman's face, and moved to the door.

Mrs Brookes stood quite still for several seconds; then she followed Harriet, joined her at the red-baize door which opened into the hall, accompanied her to the great door, where a footman waited, took a respectful leave of her, and then shut herself up in her room, and remained invisible to the household for the remainder of the day.

As Harriet Routh drove back to Amherst, she leaned her head wearily against the uncongenial woodwork of the fly, and summed up the results of her journey.

"Whatever the mother knows, the old woman knows. The old woman is as staunch as steel, and she will conceal her suspicions all the more tenaciously, the stronger they are; and I have strengthened them. What a clever old woman she is, and how brave! If my purpose had been what she suspected, I should have had some real difficulty in getting the information I required. It is clear that nothing is to be feared now, in this direction. Mrs Brookes will never speak. Mrs Carruthers is in the best possible condition for our purposes, and her son has no pretext for returning to Poynings, even if the death of the tailor had not made it quite safe for him to do so."

She did not look out upon the fair scene through which she was passing. To her, all beauty of nature was a dead thing; she had no heart-throbs of exultation in "the pomp that fills the summer-circuit of the hills;" no sense of its serene loveliness reached her busy brain, or tempted her troubled brooding eyes. When she

occasionally lifted them, in shifting her position, they might have been blind for any knowledge of the sunshine or the greenery that was in them. "I will write to him," she went on in her thoughts, "just what she told me to say. Poor George! It is hard to have to make him believe that he has broken his mother's heart, and turned his mother's brain. He does not deserve it, fool as he is. He is easily persuaded, fortunately. I don't feel fit for much that is not easy, now. The letter must be sent on at once, and, if I do my part well, and this woman dies, or remains abroad—and I fancy Mr Carruthers is not the man to bring an imbecile wife back, if he can help it—there's no reason why George should come to England again for years, that I can see."

The driver of the fly pulled up for a minute, and letting down one of the front windows, inquired whether he was to go to the inn or to the railway station. While Harriet was answering his question by desiring him to drive to the station, and looking out of the window, a young girl on horseback, a large black Newfoundland dog galloping by her horse's side, passed the fly. The driver touched his hat respectfully, and the young lady acknowledged the salute with her whip.

"That's Miss Carruthers, ma'am," said the man to Harriet, giving her the information in a manner which duly indicated the local importance of Miss Carruthers. Harriet looked back at the girl, and noted the golden gleam of her beautiful hair, the easy swaying of her graceful figure, the air of youth and refinement which characterized her.

"That's Miss Carruthers, is it?" she thought. "George has never seen her, I fancy, as he never mentioned her to me."

She had some time to wait for the train, and she went into the waiting-room. But she found it already occupied by some cheery, chatty women and children, returning from a holiday excursion. Their idle talk, their careless laughter, jarred with her mood; the children looked askance at her, and hushed their prattle; the women drew close together on the hard high leather bench which lined the room, a solemn mockery of a divan, and moderated their tones to a prim gentility. Harriet perceived the effect her presence produced, smiled slowly, and went out again upon the platform,

which she paced from end to end, until the train came up, listening idly to the raised voices and renewed laughter which reached her through the open door.

When all the other passengers had taken their places, Harriet got into a carriage which had no other occupant, and so travelled up to London alone.

Routh was in the house when she reached the Tavistock, and was surprised at her speedy return. She told him how the intelligence she had heard on her arrival at Amherst had simplified her task of investigation. She made her narrative as brief as possible, she spoke in a cold measured voice which had become habitual to her, and which filled Routh with intense concealed irritation; and she never looked at him until she had concluded.

"I'll post the letter from the old fellow at once then," said Routh; "it's only a couple of days late, and Dallas is too careless to notice that. When you write—you'd better not do it for a day or so, lest he might take it into his head to suspect you of a motive—you can tell him about our move."

Harriet acquiesced, and changed the subject to their new residence, a furnished house in May-fair. She would go there on the morrow, she said, and arrange all their little property. Had everything been removed from South Molton-street?

Everything. Routh had seen to it himself, and had employed the boy who was always about there.

"Ay," said Harriet, dreamily, for she was thinking of the time, gone for ever, when she had been happy in the home she had left without one regret or hope. "What of him?"

"Nothing that I can make out," answered Routh, irritably. "But I hate the sort of half-recollection I seem to have of him. There's something in my mind connected with him, and I can't disentangle it."

Harriet looked up at her husband in some surprise, and turned very pale. She had a painful, an indelible remembrance connected with the first time she had seen Jim Swain. But Routh knew nothing of that; so she said nothing; she made no effort to aid his memory. She would avoid the torture when she could. Besides, she was utterly weary in body and in spirits.

Mr Carruthers's letter reached George Dallas not exactly duly, indeed, but after a delay which would have astonished and exasperated the writer, had he known it, to the last degree.

Stewart Routh and Harriet were very much superior to George Dallas in many mental attributes, and in particular in cunning; but they were incapable of understanding the young man on certain points. One of these points was his love for his mother, with its concomitants of remorse, repentance, and resolution. Not comprehending this mixed feeling, they made a serious miscalculation. The day or two which Harriet allowed to intervene before she wrote the letter which was to prolong George's absence, exactly sufficed to bring him to England.

CHAPTER XIX.

CLEARED UP.

234 THE shock communicated to George Dallas by his step-father's letter was violent and terrible in proportion to the resolutions which had been growing up in his mind, and gaining strength and fixedness with each day's absence from the old accustomed scenes of dissipation and sources of temptation. Like all persons of similar temperament, he was easily overcome by agitation, and his eager nature led him to anticipate evil as readily as it caused him to enjoy good thoroughly. He was a strong man physically, but a sickening, weak shudder, such as might have shaken a woman, shook him as he read the few formal lines which conveyed to him so much more than their writer had known or intended. Was it all to be in vain? Was the golden time, the precious opportunity, gone by for ever? Was she to die, or die to him at least, and never to know that his repentance had been real, that the lesson had been effectual, that the reform had been inaugurated?

The terms in which Mr Carruthers had written to his step-son

were as vague as they were formal, and the uncertainty to which the letter condemned him was as agonizing as the misery which it produced. Where was she? He did not know; he had no means of knowing. How great were her sufferings? How imminent was her danger? These points were beyond the reach of his investigation. He knew that he was to blame for his mother's illness; he saw all things now in a new and clear light, and though his was no miraculous reformation, no sudden transformation from sinner to saint, but rather an evidence of mental growth and refinement under the influence of a new order of feelings, working on a singularly pliable temperament, George Dallas was so different to what he had been, that he shrank not only with disgust, but with wonder, from the contemplation of the perverse folly which had led to such results. He had always been dissipated, worthless, and ungrateful, he thought; why had he never realized the guilt of being so before? Why, indeed! Having been blind, now he saw; having been foolish, he had become wise. The ordinary experience, after all, but which every man and woman believes in his or her case exceptional, had come to this young man, but had come laden with exceedingly bitter grief. With swift, sudden fear, too, and stinging self-distrust; for if his mother were indeed lost to him, the great motive, a real one, however tardily acknowledged, would be lost too, and then, how should he, how could he, answer for himself? Just then, in the first keenness of his suffering, in the first thrill of fear which the sense of impending punishment sent through him, he did not think of his love, he drew no strength, no counsel, no consolation from it; the only image before his mind was that of his mother, long bowed down, and now broken, under the accumulated load of grief and disappointment which he had laid upon her. Mr Carruthers had acted characteristically, George thought, in writing to him, as he had done, merely telling him of his mother's illness and removal, but giving him no address, affording him no opportunity of writing to her. So much he had done for his own conscience' and credit's sake, not actuated by any sympathy for him. The old anger towards his step-father, the old temptation to lay the blame of all his own ill-conduct on Mr Carruthers, to regard

his banishment from Poynings as cause rather than effect, arose fiercely in George's heart, as he read the curt sentences of the letter over and over again ; but they were met and conquered by a sudden softened remembrance of his mother's appeal to him for a just judgment of her husband, whom she loved, and the better nature of the young man, newly and strongly aroused, got the victory.

"No, no," he said impetuously and aloud, "he's not to blame ; the fault is mine, and if I am never to have the chance of telling her the truth, I'll tell it to myself at all events."

George's resolution to go to England was soon taken. He must know more than Mr Carruthers had told him, and only at Poynings could he learn it. It never occurred to him that Mrs Brookes might have accompanied his mother abroad. His impulsive nature rarely permitted him to foresee any obstacle in the way of a design or a desire, and he acted in this instance with his usual headlong precipitation.

When George Dallas reached London, he found he would have just sufficient time to go to South Molton-street and see Routh or Harriet for a few minutes, before he could catch a train for Amherst. Arrived at Routh's former residence, he was surprised to observe, as he got out of a hansom, that a card, displayed in the parlour window, announced "A drawing-room floor to let." The hall-door was opened at his summons with unusual alacrity, and in reply to his inquiry, the servant, a newly-engaged one who had never seen him before, informed him that Mr and Mrs Routh had "left," and were to be found at Queen-street, Mayfair. George stood, for a moment, irresolute in surprise, and the servant repeated the address, fancying he had not heard her. His face was towards the open door, and he turned his head sharply round, as a boy's voice said, in a peculiar pert tone which had an odd indefinite familiarity for his ear :

"Any letters for Mr Routh to-day, Mary Jane? 'cos, if so, hand 'em over."

The speaker was Mr James Swain, who had come up behind George Dallas unperceived, and who, when he saw the young

man's face, gave an involuntary start, and dropped his saucy manner on the instant.

"Yes, there's three letters and a circ'lar for Mr Routh," replied Mary Jane, in a sulky tone; "and missis says as she hopes Mr Routh will put his address in the paper or something, for people is always a comin' and makin' us think as they're lodgers." Then with a glance at George, which seemed to imply that he might not have been considered ineligible in that capacity, Mary Jane went to get the letters, and Dallas addressed Jim Swain.

"Are you going back to Mr Routh's direct?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Jim. "I come every day, since they've been gone, to see after letters and messages."

"Then you can take a message from me," said George, pointing the observation with a sixpence. "Tell Mr Routh Mr Dallas has come to London, having heard bad news, and has gone to his mother's house. You won't forget?"

"No, sir, I won't forget," said Jim, in a tone of satisfactory assurance.

"Say I expect to get back to-morrow, and will come to see him at once. Mr Dallas—that's my name, remember."

George then jumped into the hansom again, and was driven away to the railway station.

"Mr Dallas," said Jim Swain to himself as he walked slowly down the street, carrying the letters confided to him by Mary Jane—"that's your name, is it? I wonder wot you've bin up to, and where you've bin up to it? I shall tell *her* the gent's message—not *him*."

The night had fallen upon the woods and fields of Poynings, and no light gleamed from the stately old house, save one ray, which shone through the open window of the housekeeper's room. By the casement sat George Dallas, his arm upon the window-sill, his head leaning against his hand, the cool fresh air of the summer night coming gratefully to his flushed and heated face. Opposite, and close to him, sat Mrs Brookes, still wearing, though their conference had lasted many hours, the look of agitation beyond the

strength to bear it which is so painful to see on the faces of the aged. All had been explained between the old woman and the prodigal son of her beloved mistress, and the worst of her fears had been dispelled. George had not the guilt of murder on his soul. The chain of circumstances was indeed as strong as ever, but the old woman did not retain the smallest fear. His word had reassured her—indeed, the first glance at his face, in the midst of the terror and surprise of their meeting, had at once and for ever put her apprehensions to flight. Innocence of *that*, at least, was in his face, in his hurried agitated greeting, in the bewilderment with which he heard her allusion to her letter, in his total unconsciousness of the various emotions which tore her heart among them. She saw, she foresaw, no explanation of the circumstances which had led to the fatal mistake she had made; she saw only that her boy was innocent, and the vastness, the intensity, of the relief sufficed, in the first moments of their meeting, to deprive it of the horror and bitterness with which, had she had any anticipation of such an event, she would have regarded it. But the first relief and the full explanation—all that George had to tell her, all she had to tell him—could not change the facts as regarded Mrs Carruthers, could not alter the irrevocable, the miserable past.

When the first confusion, excitement, and incoherent mutual questioning had given way to a more settled and satisfactory conversation, Mrs Brookes told George all that had occurred—the visit of the official gentleman from London, the servants' version of his business, the interview between Mr Carruthers and Evans, and the suspicion and fear, only too reasonable, to which all the unfortunate circumstances had given rise.

It was with the utmost difficulty that George arrived at a clear understanding of the old woman's narrative, and came to realize how overwhelming was the presumption against him. By degrees he began to recall the circumstances which had immediately preceded and followed his clandestine visit to Poynings. He recalled the remarks he had heard at the *Mercury* office; he remembered that there had been some talk of a murder, and that he had paid no attention to it, but had gone away as soon as possible, and never given the matter another thought. To find himself im-

plicated in a crime of so terrible a nature, to find that circumstances had brought him in contact with such a deed, filled him with horror and stupefaction ; to know that his mother had been forced to conceive such a suspicion was, even without the horrible addition of the effect produced on her, suffering far greater than any he had ever known. He felt giddy, sick, and bewildered, and could but look piteously at his faithful old friend, with a white face and wild haggard eyes.

"She believed it?" he said again and again.

"No, George, no ; she only feared it, and she could not bear the fear ; no wonder, for I could hardly bear it, and I am stronger than she is, and not your mother, after all. But just think, George. You bought the coat from Evans, and the man who wore that coat was seen in the company of the murdered man the last time he was seen alive. I knew there must be some dreadful mistake. I knew you never lifted your hand against any man's life, and that some one else must have got possession of the coat ; but your mother said no, that you had worn it when she saw you at Amherst, and nothing could remove the impression. George, what did you do with the coat you bought at Evans's?"

"I had it down here, sure enough," answered George, "and I did wear it when she last saw me. I left it at Mr Routh's afterwards, by mistake, and took one of his abroad with me ; but this is a horrid mystery altogether. Who is the man who has been murdered ? What is the motive ?"

"I cannot tell you that, George," said Mrs Brookes ; "but I will give you the papers, and then you will know all, and you will understand how much she suffered."

The old woman left George alone for a few minutes, while she went to her bedroom to get the newspapers which she locked securely away at the bottom of a trunk. During her absence the young man strode about the room distractedly, trying in vain to collect his thoughts and set them down steadily to the solution of the terrible mystery which surrounded him.

"Here they are, George," said Ellen, as she entered the room and handed him a roll of newspapers. "Sit down here, by the window, and try to read them quietly. I must leave you now,

and tell the servants who you are, and that you are going to stay here to-night—there must be no concealment now; thank God, it's not wanted any longer. Perhaps out of all this evil good may come, my boy."

He had sat down by the window, and was eagerly opening the roll of paper, and seeking the account of the murder. Mrs Brookes paused by his side for a moment, laid her withered hand gently on his hair, and then left him. A moment after he started up from his chair, and cried out:

"Good God! the man was Deane!"

The shock of this discovery was extreme. Wholly unable as he had been to account for the coincidence which Mrs Brookes's imperfect story (for, like most persons of her class, she was an unskilful narrator of facts) had unfolded to him, he had never supposed his connection with it real, and now he saw it all, and in a moment perceived the gravity of his situation. The nameless man whom he had seen so often, and yet known so slightly; concerning whom he had speculated often and carelessly; whom no one had recognized; whose singular dress the waiter at the tavern had described in his evidence; the date; all was conclusive. The man murdered was Deane. But who was the murderer? How was it that no one had recognized the body? With all his mysterious ways, in spite of the callous selfishness which had rendered him indifferent to companionship save in the mere pursuit of his pleasures, it seemed wonderful that no one should have been able to identify him.

"There's Routh, now," said George to himself, "he must have heard of the finding of the body, he must have read the description of the dress; he may have seen the man's fur coat before, though I never did. To be sure, he did not dine with us that day, but he knew where Deane dined and with whom. What can Routh have been about?"

These and a thousand questions of a similar nature George Dallas put to himself, without finding any answer to them, without stilling the tumult in his mind. He tried to arrange the circumstances in their order of occurrence, and to think them out, but in vain; he could not do so yet: all was confusion and vague

horror. He had not liked this man. Theirs had been the mere casual association of convenience and amusement—an association, perhaps, the foremost of all those which he was firmly determined never to renew; and yet he could not regard its dreadful ending with indifference. The life which had perverted George had not hardened him, and he could not readily throw off the impression created by the discovery that the man with whom he had joined in the pursuit of reckless and degrading pleasure had died a violent death within so short a time of their last meeting. When Mrs Brookes came into the room again, the expression of the young man's face terrified her afresh.

"Ellen," he said, "this is a dreadful business, apart from my unhappy complication with it, and what it has cost my dear mother. I knew this unhappy man; he was a Mr Deane. I dined with him at that tavern in the Strand. I did wear that coat. All the circumstances are correct, though all the inferences are false. I begin to understand it all now; but who can have murdered him, and for what motive, I cannot conceive. The most natural thing in the world was that they would suspect me, as the man who wore the coat. Mr Evans will recognize me, no doubt, as he told Mr Carruthers."

"No, no, George; the poor old man is dead," interrupted Mrs Brookes.

"Dead?" said George. "Well, he seemed an honest fellow, and I am sorry for it; but it makes no difference in my position. When I communicate with the police, I will admit all he could prove."

"Must you do that, George?" asked Mrs Brookes, wistfully. She had a natural dread of the law in the abstract.

"Of course I must, nurse; I can tell them who the unfortunate man was, and account for him up to a very late hour on the night of the seventeenth of April."

"Take care, George," said the old woman. "If you can't account for yourself afterwards, you can't clear yourself."

The observation was shrewd and sensible. George felt it so, and said, "Never mind that. I am innocent, and when the time comes I shall have no difficulty in proving myself innocent."

"You know best, George," said the old woman, with a resigned sigh; "but tell me, who was this poor man?"

"Sit down and I will tell you all about it."

Then George seated his old friend close beside him, and told her the whole story of his intercourse with Stewart Routh, of his knowledge of Deane, his last meeting with him, their dinner together, the adjournment to the billiard-rooms, the money won by Dallas from Deane, and his leaving town early the next morning for Amherst.

"That was the day they found the body, was it not?" asked Mrs Brookes.

"Let me see," said George; and he again referred to the newspapers.

"Yes, it was on Wednesday the eighteenth—in the evening. I was down at Amherst then, nurse; that was the day I saw my mother last."

He sighed, but a smile stole over his face also. A cherished memory of that day abode in his heart.

Then Mrs Brookes questioned George concerning Routh and his wife, and told him of Harriet's visit, and all the emotion and fear which it had caused her. George was touched and grateful.

"That was like her," he said; "she is the truest of friends, a treasure among women. I wonder she did not write to me, though, when she sent on Mr Carruthers's letter."

The observation passed unnoticed by Mrs Brookes. Had she asked when the letter had reached George, a discovery, dangerous to the interests of Harriet and Routh, might have been made; but she had very dim notions of continental places and distances, and the time consumed in postal transmission.

"They knew this poor man; did they not know that he was the murdered person?"

"No," said George, "they had no notion of it. How shocked they will be when I tell them of it! Routh will be the best person in the world to tell me how to go about communicating with the police authorities. But now, Ellen, tell me about my mother."

Time went over, and the night fell, and the old woman and the

young man still talked together, and she tried to comfort him, and make him believe that all would be well. But George was slow to take such comfort—full of remorse and self-condemnation, of gloom and foreboding. The mercurial temperament of the young man made him a bad subject for such suspense and self-reproach, and though he had no shadow of fear of any trouble to come to him from the evidence on the inquest, there was a dull brooding sense of apprehension over him, against which he had no power, no heart, to strive. So he listened to the story of his mother's illness and departure, the physicians' opinions, and Mr Carruthers's plans for her benefit and comfort, and darker and darker fell the shadow upon his heart.

"We have had no news since they left Paris," said Mrs Brookes, in conclusion, "but I expect to see Miss Carruthers to-morrow. She will have a letter from her uncle."

"Miss Carruthers!" said George, lifting up his head with renewed animation. "Has she not gone abroad with them?"

"No," said Mrs Brookes; "she is staying at the Sycamores, Sir Thomas Boldero's place. Sir Thomas is her uncle on the mother's side. She rides over very often to see me, and I expect her to-morrow."

"At what hour does she generally come?" asked George.

"In the afternoon; after lunch."

"Well, I shall be in London by that time, nurse; so there is no danger of my incurring my step-father's wrath this time by an encounter with the heiress."

There was a momentary touch of bitterness in George's voice, but his slow sad smile contradicted it.

"Ah, George!" said the old woman. "Take heart. All will be well, and the time will come when you will be welcome here."

"Perhaps so, nurse. In the mean time, you will let me know what news Miss Carruthers brings, and especially where my mother is, and their next move."

That night George Dallas slept for the first time under the roof of the old house at Poynings; but an early hour in the morning found him on his way back to town.

When Clare Carruthers, mounted on Sir Lancelot and escorted

by Cæsar, arrived at Poynings on the following afternoon, she was surprised to find Mrs Brookes looking well and cheerful. The girl had brought good news. Mrs Carruthers had borne the journey well, and it was proposed that she should leave Paris and proceed to the south of France after the interval of a week. Clare roamed over the house and gardens as usual. She was beautiful as ever, but with a new and graver beauty than of old. There was no observant eye to mark the change, no kindred spirit to note and share the girl's trouble. She was quite alone. When she returned from her ramble, and while her horse was being brought round, she went to Mrs Brookes's room to bid her good-bye. The old woman took two letters out of her desk, and said: "Do you remember these letters, Miss Carruthers? You brought them to me when Mrs Carruthers was first taken ill."

"Yes, I remember. What of them?" Clare answered, carelessly.

"Will you have the kindness to enclose them in a large envelope, and direct them to Mr George Dallas for me?"

"Certainly," said Clare; but she looked a little surprised, for Mrs Brookes wrote remarkably well for a person of her class.

"I wrote to him lately," said Mrs Brookes, "and the letter did not reach him; so I suppose I directed it indistinctly."

Clare sat down at the table, and in a large bold hand wrote the address which Harriet had given upon the envelope.

"You are sending Mr Dallas these letters that he may read them, as his mother is unable?" asked Clare, to whom the forbidden subject of Mrs Carruthers's son always offered more or less temptation.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the old woman; "I am pretty sure they come from Mr Felton, and ought to be seen to."

"And who is Mr Felton?" said Clare, rising and laying down her pen. "I'll post them as I pass through the village," she added.

"Mr Felton is Mrs Carruthers's brother," said Mrs Brookes. "He has been in America many years, but she said something lately about his coming home."

Clare said no more, but took her leave, and went away. She

posted the packet for George Dallas at the village, and, as she rode on, her fair face bore the impress of a painful recollection. She was thinking of the morning on which she had ventured to send the warning to him who was so unworthy of the fancies she had cherished—him of whom she could not think without a shudder, of whom she hardly dared to think at all. When the post was delivered the following morning at the Sycamores, a large packet was placed before Miss Carruthers. It was directed to her, and contained two numbers of the *Piccadilly*, with two instalments of George's serial story, and on the fly leaf of one were the words, "From Paul Ward."

CHAPTER XX.

ONCE MORE TIDED OVER.

AN air of respectability and the presence of good taste characterized the house in Queen-street, Mayfair, now occupied by Mr and Mrs Routh. These things were inseparable from a dwelling of Harriet's. She had the peculiar feminine talent for embellishing the place she lived in, however simple and small were the means at her disposal. The lodgings at South Molton-street had never had the comfortless look and feeling of lodgings, and now there was apparently no lack of money to make the new home all that a house of its size and capabilities need be. Harriet moved about her present dwelling, not as she had moved about her former home, indeed, with happy alacrity, but with the same present judgment, the same critical eye; and though all she did now was done mechanically, it was done thoroughly.

Harriet was very restless on the day that was to bring George Dallas to their new residence. She had duly received his message from Jim Swain, and though the keen eye of the boy, who was singularly observant of her in every particular that came under his notice, had detected that the intelligence imparted a

shock to her, she had preserved her composure wonderfully, in conveying the unwelcome news to her husband. Routh had received it with far less calmness. He felt in a moment that the delay of Harriet's projected letter, a delay prescribed by himself, had induced the return of Dallas, and angry with himself for the blunder, he was angry with her that she had not foreseen the risk. He was often angry with Harriet now; a strange kind of dislike to her arose frequently in his base and ungrateful heart, and the old relations between them had undergone a change, unavowed by either, but felt keenly by both. The strength of character on which Routh knew he could rely to any extent, which he knew would never fail him or its owner, made him strangely afraid, in the midst of all the confidence it inspired, and he was constrained in his wife's presence, and haunted out of it.

Stewart Routh had never been a rough-spoken man; the early tradition of his education had preserved him from the external coarseness of a vagabond life, but the underlying influences of an evil temper asserted themselves at times. Thus when Harriet told him gently, and with her blue eyes bright with reassuring encouragement, that Dallas was in England, and would be with them on the morrow, he turned upon her with an angry oath. She shrank back from him for a moment, but the next, she said, gently:

"We must meet this, Stewart, like all the rest, and it can be done."

"How?" he said, rudely; "how is it to be met?"

"I will meet it, Stewart," she replied. Trust me: you have often done so, and never had cause to regret the consequence. I am changed, I know. I have not so much quickness and readiness as I had, but I have no less courage. Remember what my influence over George Dallas was; it is still unchanged; let me use it to the utmost of my ability. If it fails, why then"—she spoke very slowly, and leaned her hand heavily on his shoulder with the words,—“then we have but to do what I at least have always contemplated.”

Their eyes met, and they looked steadily at each other for some moments; then withdrawing his gaze from her with difficulty, Routh said, sullenly, "Very well, let it be so; you must see him

first : but I suppose I shall have to see him ; I can't escape that, can I ? ”

She looked at him with a queer glance for a moment, and the shadow of a smile just flickered over her lips. Could he escape ? That was his thought, his question. Did she ever ask it for herself ? But the impression, irresistible to the woman's keen perception, was only momentary. She answered the base query instantly.

“ No, you cannot ; the thing is impossible. But I will see him first, and alone ; then if I succeed with him, no risk can come of your seeing him ; if I fail, the danger must be faced. ”

He turned sulkily away, and leaned upon the window-frame, looking idly into the street.

“ You don't know when he will be here, I suppose ? ” he said, presently.

“ I do not ; but I fancy early in the day. ”

“ It's too bad. I am sick of this. The thing is over now. Why is it always cropping up ? ”

He spoke to himself rather than to her ; but she heard him, and the colour flew over her pale face at his words. He left the room soon after, and then Harriet sat down in the weary way that had become habitual to her, and murmured

“ It is done and over ; and he wonders why it is always cropping up, and I— ”

Stewart Routh did not return home until late that night. Such absences had become common now, and Harriet made no comment then or ever. How she passed the hours of solitude he did not inquire, and, indeed, she could hardly have told. On this particular evening she had employed herself on the close and attentive perusal of a number of letters. They were all written by George Dallas, and comprised the whole of his correspondence with her. She read them with attentive eye and knitted brow ; and when she locked the packet up in her desk again, she looked, as Mrs Brookes had seen her, like a woman who had a purpose, and who clearly saw her way to its fulfilment.

But the next day Harriet was restless. She could do the thing that lay before her, but she wanted the time for doing it to be

come; she wanted to get it over. If this were weakness, then in this Harriet was weak.

Immediately after breakfast Stewart Routh went out. Only a few words had been exchanged between him and Harriet on the subject of George's expected visit, and Harriet had gone to the drawing-room when George came. She met him with the old frank welcome which he remembered so well, and, in answer to his inquiry for Routh, said she was momentarily expecting him.

"You know what brought me back to England," George said, when he was seated, and the first greeting was over; "you got my message?"

"That bad news had reached you. Yes," replied Harriet. "I was just about to write to you. You would have had my letter to-day. I learned from the newspapers that your mother was ill and—"

"And went to see about it for me. I know all your goodness, Mrs Routh, and can never thank you for it half enough. It is only of a piece, though, with all your goodness to me. You have always been the best and truest of friends. My old nurse told me all about your visit. God bless you, Mrs Routh." And George Dallas took her hand, and, for the second time in his life, kissed it.

There was a pause, a dangerous pause. Harriet felt it, for her heart was beating thickly, and her face was not under such command but that the interested eyes which were looking into it might read the traces of a deep and painful emotion.

"You have been comforted by your visit to Poynings," she said. "You have more hope and relief about your mother? Mrs Brookes has told you all particulars."

"Yes, Mrs Routh, I did hear all the particulars, and I also made an extraordinary and terrible discovery in connection with that illness."

"Indeed!" said Harriet, leaning towards him with the liveliest interest and concern in every feature of her face. "It is not that the illness is of a hopeless nature, I hope?"

"I trust not," he said, solemnly; "but, Mrs Routh, my mother

has been nearly killed by being obliged to suspect me of a dreadful crime."

"A dreadful crime! You, Mr Dallas! What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Dallas, "that a murder has been committed, in which I would appear to have been implicated. I know what I am about to tell you will agitate and distress you, Mrs Routh, and one of the most mysterious points of a mysterious subject is, that it should be my lot to tell it to you." He hesitated, then went on: "I don't know whether I ought to tell you all that I have heard. I have to consult Routh on some important matters, so that it is the more unfortunate that he is out of the way, as no time must be lost in what I have to do."

The occasion had come now, and Harriet was equal to it. It was with a smile, serious but quite unembarrassed, that she said:

"Don't depose me from the position of your confidant, George." She called him by his Christian name for the first time. "You know Stewart has no secret from me. Whatever you would tell to him, tell to me. I have more time at your disposal than he has, though not more friendship. In this matter count us as one. Indeed," she added, with a skilful assumption of playfulness, which did not, however, alter the gravity of George's manner, "as I am your correspondent, I claim precedence by prescriptive right."

"I hardly know how to tell you, Mrs Routh; all the circumstances are so shocking, and so very, very strange. You and Routh have been rather surprised, have you not, by the sudden disappearance of Deane? Routh always thought him an odd, eccentric, unaccountable sort of fellow, coming nobody knew whence, and likely to go nobody knew whither; but yet it has surprised you and Routh a little that, since the day we were to have dined together in the Strand, Deane has never turned up, hasn't it?"

The strength and self-control which formed such striking features in Harriet's character were severely tried, almost beyond their limits, by the expectation of the revelation which George was about to make; but there was not a questioning tone in her voice, not a quiver on her lip, as the minutes passed by, while she won him more and more securely by her calm interest and friendliness. His growing anxiety to see Routh confirmed her in the belief that

he knew all that his mother and Mrs Brookes had known. Remembering the agony she had suffered when she and George had last talked together, and feeling that the present crisis was scarcely less momentous, she rallied all her powers—and they were considerable—and asked him boldly what it was he had to communicate to her. In a voice of the deepest solemnity, he said, taking her hand in his :

“The man who has been murdered, of whose murder my mother was led to suspect me, was Philip Deane !”

“Good God !” cried Harriet, and shrunk back in her chair, covering her face with her hands.

He had reason to say that the news he had to tell her would agitate and distress her. Her whole frame crept and trembled, and a chill moisture broke out on her smooth forehead and pale shivering cheeks. George was alarmed at her distress, and she knew by the intensity of her emotion, now that the words she had been expecting were spoken, how much her nervous system had suffered in the long struggle she had fought out with such success. He tried to calm her, and loved and admired her all the more for her keen womanly feeling.

“Horrible, most horrible !” she murmured, her eyes still hidden in her shaking hands. “But how do you know ? Tell me all you know.”

Then George told her without omission or reservation. She listened eagerly, greedily, and as the narrative proceeded she became quite calm. George dwelt on his astonishment that Routh had not made the discovery which had forced itself on him, but Harriet disposed of that part of the matter in a moment.

“You forget,” she said, “he was not in London. When you came to me, on your return from Amherst, do you not remember I told you Stewart was away, hiding from his creditors, poor fellow ? He never heard of the murder, very likely ; he never interests himself in such horrors. Indeed, he never mentioned anything about it to me, and of course he must have known at once that the man was Deane. The very name of the tavern in the Strand where he was to have dined himself would have suggested the idea.”

"Precisely so," said George ; " that was the thing which puzzled me so completely, and made me anxious to see him."

"The strangeness of the coincidence," said Harriet, "is as remarkable as the event is horrible. It only proves how mistaken are our notions of the laws of chance. What could be more wildly improbable than that, living in the midst of London, and within constant reach of the talk and speculation about it, Stewart and I should have known nothing of the matter?"

"Very extraordinary indeed," said George ; "one of those facts which would be denounced as too unnatural, if they were told in fiction. And how unfortunate! What a terrible mystery Routh might have cleared up!"

"And yet," Harriet replied, with a furtive glance at Dallas, full of keen and searching expression, "what could he have told, beyond the fact that he had known the man under the name of Deane? After all, it comes to that, and to no more, doesn't it?"

"To no more, my dear Mrs Routh? To a great deal more. When we tell the police what we know, there will be not only an identification of the body, but an explanation of the motive."

"I don't quite understand you," said Harriet ; and as she spoke, there came a click in her throat, as there had come when she and George Dallas had last spoken together.

Would it ever be over? Should her purpose ever be gained?

"Don't you?" said George, surprised, "and you so quick, too. But no wonder you are upset by this ; it is so dreadful when one has known the person, is it not? But you *will* see in a moment that our being able to depose to the large sum of money and the jewels in the poor fellow's possession will make the motive quite plain. They have got a notion now that he was a foreigner, and that the motive was political, whereas it was of course simply a robbery. He resisted, I suppose, and was killed in the scuffle."

"Does the report read like that?" asked Harriet, faintly.

"It simply says he was stabbed," said George ; "but it is plain that all the newspapers took up the political-murder notion at once, and then, of course, their reports would be made to fit their

theory. No doubt some ruffian did it who knew that he had a large sum about him that day. Very likely he had been traced from the City ; he had been there to get some securities. I can swear to his having told me that, at all events. How very ill you look, Mrs Routh ! This ghastly story has been too much for you. I don't think you ever liked poor Deane, but no one could know of a man's coming to such an untimely end, if he was ever such a bad fellow, and not feel it, especially you. I wish I had not said anything. It would have been better for Routh to have told you this."

"No, no," said Harriet. "Indeed it is better that I should hear it from you, and you are mistaken in supposing I am so much overcome entirely on account of—on account of—"

"The murder? Yes?" asked George, looking anxiously at her.

"It is all dreadful ; no one in the world can feel it to be more dreadful than I do," said Harriet, earnestly.

As she spoke she rose from her chair, pushed her hair off her forehead, and began to walk slowly up and down the room. George sat still, following her with his eyes, and noting, in all his excitement and perturbation of spirit, the change which a few weeks had made in her appearance.

"I am grieved and troubled for you, George. I see in this serious results for you, and I think more of them."

"For me, Mrs Routh? What can happen for me in this matter that has not already happened? My mother has suffered all she can suffer. Time may or may not restore her. Surely the follies and sins of my life have been heavily punished. Nothing can undo all this misery ; but nothing can be added to it either. I have only to set the mystery at rest."

"Take care, George," said Harriet, earnestly ; "I am not sure of that. Let us look at the case in all its bearings. Nothing that you have to tell can contradict the evidence given at the inquest, and which directs suspicion against you. You did dine with this wretched man ; you did leave the tavern in his company ; you did wear the coat to which the waiter swears."

"Ah, by the by," said George, "that was the coat I left at

your house. Where is it, Mrs Routh? It must be produced, of course."

He did not yet perceive that she was trying to shake his determination; but she answered his question with truly wonderful carelessness. "The coat; O yes, I remember. You wrote to me about it. It must be here, of course, unless it has been lost in the flitting from South Molton-street. He tells me a lot of his things have gone astray."

"Well," said George, "that's easily found out. Pray go on, Mrs Routh. You were saying—"

"I was saying, George, that when you put together all the strange coincidences in this matter which have led, naturally, it must be said, to such a conclusion as that the man who wore the coat which you bought at Amherst is the criminal whom the police want to arrest—I think you would find it very difficult to prove that you are not the man!"

"Good God! You are not serious?" cried George.

"I am perfectly serious," Harriet answered. "How can you prove it? How do I, at this moment, know in a manner which I could demonstrate to legal satisfaction that you are not the man who did the deed?"

George looked at her in astonishment.

"Of course I *do* know it—that is, I believe it, which is quite a different thing; but supposing I did not believe it, supposing my mind were not made up about it, how would you propose to prove it to me? Tell me that, and then the strength of my argument, the value of my advice, will become evident to you, I think."

Still George looked at her, and his colour rose. He was unaccountably embarrassed by the question. The whole thing had appeared to him as simple for him as it was terrible for Deane, when Harriet began to speak. It bore a very different aspect now.

"I—I should prove that I parted with Deane, that night, at the door of the billiard-rooms where we had been playing."

"Outside the door or inside, before witnesses or alone?" interrupted Harriet.

"Why, it certainly was outside the door, and we were alone."

"Exactly. Then your having parted with him that night is just

what you cannot prove ; and as you cannot prove that, you can prove nothing. Let me repeat to you your own account of that night's proceedings, and you will see that you can prove nothing to outweigh the presumptive evidence against you. You told me this wretched man had money about him which he boasted of ; therefore you knew he was a rich prey. You had no money—only a few shillings at least ; you went to your lodgings that night, and left them without notice on the following morning, having paid your landlady with a ten-pound note that had been in this man's possession. How can you account for that ? You went to Amherst, where you remained, alone, under a feigned name, for four days ; you returned to London, where it can be proved the occurrence was, at the time, a topic of general discussion, late at night. You went abroad the following morning, and at Amsterdam you offered certain valuable diamonds for sale. The diamonds are your mother's, you say, and formed part of a bracelet given to you by her."

"No, no," said George ; "I never would explain that under any circumstances."

Harriet smiled, but the steadfast earnestness of her manner was not lessened by the smile, which was just a little contemptuous.

"That is precisely what you would be forced to explain," she continued. "Certain diamond ornaments were among the articles in the possession of the murdered man, says the newspaper report," she pointed to the passage with a steady hand. He read it, and listened in silence, his face grave and anxious.

"You must account for the diamonds which you sold at Amsterdam ; how are you to prove, otherwise, that they are not those the wretched man wore when he was seen in your company ?"

"I remember his studs and his ring," said George, in a low agitated voice. "I wonder they have not been traced."

Harriet did not reply for a moment ; and the click in her throat was painfully hard and audible, as she said at length : "They would have been broken up, of course ; and remember, George, they were unset diamonds you sold at Amsterdam."

George Dallas leaned his elbows on the table, and his head on

his hands. He looked at Harriet, and her face changed when his gaze was removed—changed to a look of sharp, terrible anxiety, to all the intentness of one pleading in a desperate cause.

"You must tell the story of your visit to Amherst; you must tell the truth about your mother and the jewels; moreover, you must prove it. Can your mother do that for you?"

"No," said George, drearily; "but my old nurse can."

"How? Did she see you on the Wednesday, when you arrived at Amherst? Did she see you at all until the Monday? Could she swear you were at Amherst in the interval? And, supposing she could, what would it avail? Look here, George, this man's body was found on the Wednesday evening, the eighteenth of April, and the presumption is that it had been a night and a day in the river. Do you see what this means?" She put her hand on his shoulder, and grasped it securely. He shrunk from her light fingers; they hurt his flesh as though they had been steel bars. She struck the newspaper lying open on the table with the other hand, and said with a desperate effort, "It means this, George: The man was found on Wednesday; but the deed was done on Tuesday night—done, of course, after you left him; but who can prove that? He was seen alive in your company late on Tuesday night, and he was never seen alive again. The hours of that night must be accounted for, George, if you are to prove yourself guiltless. How can you account for them after the time the waiter saw you leave the tavern together?"

George did not answer. She caught her breath and went on, fixing on him a sideway look of intense anxiety.

"Can any of the people at the billiard-rooms prove at what hour you left them? Can any one at your former lodgings prove at what hour you reached home that night?"

"I don't think we left any one after us at the billiard-room but the marker," George replied. "By the way, how extraordinary he did not come forward at the inquest! He must have noticed Deane's odd appearance, and his diamond studs and things. I should think."

"One would think so," said Harriet; "but I dare say the foreign

look is commonly enough seen in such places. Still the coat must have been very conspicuous. I forget whether you said you were in the habit of going to those particular billiard-rooms."

"I did not say anything about it, Mrs Routh. I never was there but that once. It is very odd, as you say, about Deane's coat, but the poor man hadn't it on. After we left the tavern, I said it was an odd, un-English kind of coat, and too warm, I should think, for the weather; but he said he had 'the shakes' that day—Yankee for ague, you know—and had never worn it before in this country. He carried it over his arm, I remember, the cloth side out, and threw it into a corner of the billiard-room. I dare say no one saw it."

"Had he put it on when you parted with him?" asked Harriet.

"No," said George; "he was still carrying it over his arm, and I remember now that I said to him, 'You had better button that trapper's wrap of yours over all that money you've been staggering under the weight of.' 'Lightened a little, old fellow, by you,' he said, though he had paid his losses in a note, not in gold."

Harriet's face was less anxious now.

"Poor fellow!" George went on, with a slight shudder; "how dreadful it is—such light words, too, as we parted with. When he handed me the note, he asked for pen and ink, and wrote his name upon it, in full, over some initials—A. F., I think—and told me a queer story about an old lady who always indorsed her notes with her name, residence, and the date of her birth, and how he once traced a forgery by a bank-note, purporting to come from her, being devoid of those eccentric inscriptions. He was telling me the story as we went out."

George's discursive fancy had wandered from his own position to the circumstances which invested Deane's fate with additional sadness to his mind. Harriet frowned angrily at this proof of his invincibly light nature, and went on sharply:

"All this adds strength to my argument. But I asked you another question. Did any one in the house you lodged at know at what hour you went home that night? Is any one in a position to prove it?"

"No," said George. "I let myself in with a latch-key, and

made no noise. I never did when I could help it, there, the old woman was such a Tartar."

"Then there is not a flaw in my argument, George," she said, in a sweet, solemn tone, which, from the first time he had heard it, had had an irresistible charm for the young man; "there is nothing to be gained for any one, for any conceivable interest that you are bound to consider, for any interest, indeed, except the abstract one of the law, in telling what you know of this matter."

"The man's friends," remonstrated George, who, habitually submissive to her, did not recoil at the suggestion, as he would infallibly have recoiled had it come from any other person; "they may not know, they may be in suspense, in misery."

"I hardly think so," said Harriet, and her blue eyes had their coldest colour, and her sweet voice its subtlest inflection of scorn. "Did you ever hear him mention relative or friend. Did you ever know a man so cold, so callous, so base, so shamelessly devoid of any interest save in his own pleasure or his own gain? Did you ever know one so narrow-hearted, so mean-spirited, of so crafty and cruel a nature?" Her energy quite startled George. She was looking straight before her, and her hand was raised as though she were tracing a picture as her mind produced it. "The man was a reptile, George—a cruel snake in his nature. I don't believe any one on earth ever loved him, except his mother in his babyhood. I hope she's dead; yes, I trust she's dead! And that you should peril your safety, drag your mother's name into the police-courts, rouse all the anger, stab all the pride, of your step-father, ruin, or at least greatly injure, your own prospects, by the revelations you will be forced to make, supposing (which, I confess, I think most difficult and improbable) you do prove your own innocence, seems to me utterly monstrous and irrational. Remember, you can give justice only negative assistance. If you prove that Deane was the victim, and you not the criminal, you can't tell them who the criminal is, or give them any information about Deane."

"No," said George, very quickly; "but then, you know, Routh can."

Harriet dropped her hand off his shoulder, and fell into a chair.

"You are overdone, Mrs Routh," George said, tenderly, as he took her hand in his, and resumed his old manner of deferential affection. "You have talked too long and too much about this murder, and it has been too much for you. I ought to have seen that before. We won't say another word about it, until I have consulted Routh. How shocked he will be! I will think of all you have said; but I will do nothing to-day. I can't even wait to see him now, for I must get down to the *Mercury* office by four. I must leave you now."

"You are sure you will do nothing until we have seen you again?" Harriet said, faintly. "George, let nothing induce you to mention the matter at the *Mercury*. Only think of the godsend a hint would be to them."

"I'll take care," said George. "I will not stir in the matter till I have talked it over thoroughly with you."

"You will stay here, George, of course," said Harriet, kindly, holding out her hand, but without rising. "We have a room at your disposal now, you know."

"Thank you, Mrs Routh, I will; but I don't think I shall be more than a day or two in London, unless I should be detained by this sad business."

"Are you going back to Amsterdam?" asked Harriet.

"No," said George; "I am going to my mother."

"I was right," Harriet said, when she was alone, as she lay back in her chair, pale and exhausted. "I thought the one strong motive, the motive which, though late aroused, has been strong enough to save George Dallas from himself, could be powerful now. Twice his mother has helped, has saved, at his expense, his worst, his involuntary enemy. There was nothing else to work upon, but that has succeeded."

Harriet was right to a certain extent, but not quite right. Another motive had helped the end she desired to gain, and George named it to his own heart as he walked down to the *Mercury* office by the name of Clare Carruthers.

"You are a wonderful woman, Harry," said Routh, when Harriet had concluded the brief statement into which she condensed

her report of the interview between herself and George. But, though he spoke in a tone of strong admiration, and his face relaxed into a look of intense relief, he did not hold her in his arms and kiss her passionately now. "You are a wonderful woman, and this danger is escaped."

She smiled a little bitterly, very sadly, as she said :

"I don't know. At all events, it is once more tided over."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE AMERICAN LETTERS.

STEWART ROUTH was as hard a man as could readily be found, but his hardness was not proof against his meeting with George Dallas, and he showed Harriet how great a trial it was to him, and how much he feared his own constancy, when he told her he thought she had better not be present at their meeting. The curse of an unholy alliance had fallen upon these two, and was now beginning to make itself felt. Each was desirous to conceal from the other the devices to which they were compelled to resort, in order to keep up the false appearances to which they were condemned ; in all their life there was no time in which they were free from restraint, except in solitude. But, though the effect was in each case the same, the origin was widely different. Harriet suffered for her husband's sake ; he, entirely for his own. He had calculated that if anything in his appearance, voice, and manner, should escape his control, George would be certain to impute it to the natural feelings of horror and regret with which he would have received the intelligence conveyed to him by Harriet, of George's discovery of the identity of the murdered man.

"You had better remain up-stairs until I call you," Routh had said to Harriet, "when Dallas comes to dinner. It will be easier for you," he added. Harriet was sitting listlessly by her dressing-table while he spoke, and he stood behind her chair, and looked gloomily at the reflection of her face in the glass.

She smiled faintly. "Thank you, Stewart," she said ; "it will be easier." Then, after a brief pause, "Would you very much mind my not going down to dinner at all?"

So far from minding it, Routh instantly felt that her absence would be a great relief. It would enable him to sound George thoroughly, to scheme upon whatever discoveries he should make concerning his future plans ; and then, Harriet had done all the hard work, had prepared the way for him, had got over the difficulty and the danger. A little unpleasantness, some disagreeable emotion, must indeed be encountered, that was inevitable, but everything might go off well, and if so, Harriet's restraining presence, Harriet's face, with its constant reminder in it, would be much better out of sight.

"Not at all," he answered. "Stay up-stairs if you like. I'll tell Dallas you are a little knocked up, but will be all right in the morning."

"He will not be surprised, I dare say," she replied, "though it was not my way to be knocked up formerly."

"Nor to be always harping on one string, either ; and I can't say there's a change for the better," said Routh roughly. Once or twice of late the innate ruffianism of the man had come out towards her, from whom it had once been so scrupulously concealed. But she did not heed it ; not a quiver crossed the drooping rigid face, at which Routh once more glanced covertly before he left the room. It would have been impossible to tell whether she had even heard him.

Routh went down to the well-appointed dining-room, so different to the scene of the dinners of which George had formerly partaken, in the character of his guest. Wherever Harriet was, neatness and propriety never were absent, but there was something more than neatness and propriety in Routh's house now. Nevertheless, the look which the master of the house cast upon the well-laid, well-lighted table, with its perfect, unobtrusive, unpretentious appointments, was full of gloom. He wished he had not come down so soon ; the inevitable meeting assumed a more portentous aspect with every minute that it was delayed ; he wished he had not told Harriet to remain in her room. The fact was, Routh was stag-

gered by the first failure of his plans. Everything had gone so right with him ; his calculations had been fulfilled so exactly, so unflinchingly, until now, and this unexpected accident had befallen through a blunder of his own. True, Harriet had met it with amazing tact, and had so treated it, that if only it could be further dexterously managed, it might be turned to ultimate advantage, and an incalculable strengthening of his position. Let him keep his thoughts to that view of the question, and keep his nerves still. Were they going to play him false now, his nerves, which had never failed him before ? So Mr Stewart Routh passed a very unpleasant quarter of an hour before his expected guest arrived. He had just had recourse, as much in weakness as in nervousness, to a flask of brandy which stood on the sideboard, and had drank off half a glassful, when a knock at the door was quickly answered by the grave and correct man-servant, who formed an important and eminently respectable feature of the improved household of the Rouths, and the well-known quick tread of Dallas crossed the hall.

"Well, Routh, old fellow !"

"George, my boy ; delighted to see you !" and the meeting was over ; and Routh, looking into the young man's face, saw that not a trace of suspicion rested upon it, and that the material before him was as plastic as ever.

"Harriet is not very well this evening," said Routh, "and begs you will excuse her if she does not make her appearance. I undertook to make it all right, and indeed I am rather glad we should be alone just at first. I have so much to say and to hear, and Harriet has had a long talk with you already."

"Yes," said George, and his smile was at once overcast, and his face darkened into gloom, "I had a long talk with her. Of course, Routh, she told you the dreadful discovery I have made, and the curious way in which I am implicated in this ghastly affair."

"She told me all about it, my dear fellow," returned Routh. "But here comes dinner, and we must postpone discussion until afterwards. I can only say now that I think Harriet's view of the matter perfectly correct, and her advice the soundest possible ; it generally is, you know of old." And then Routh made a slight

signal suggestive of caution to his guest, and the two men stood by the fireplace and talked of trifles while the irreproachable manservant set the dishes upon the table, assisted by a neat parlour-maid.

While far more serious thoughts were busy in George's mind, over the surface of it was passing observation of the changed order of things, and an amused perception of the alteration in Routh himself. It was as he had said in his letter—he had assumed the responsibility, the pose, the prosperity of the genuine plodding "City man;" and he looked the part to absolute perfection. "And yet," George thought, "he knows that one who was with us two the last time we met has met with a violent death; he knows that I am in a position as painful and perilous as it is extraordinary, and that he is indirectly mixed up with the dreadful event, and he is as cool and unconcerned as possible. I suppose it is constitutional, this callousness; but I'm not sure it is very enviable. However, one thing is certain—it makes him the very best adviser one can possibly have under such circumstances. He won't be carried away by the horror of the circumstances, anyhow."

The dinner proceeded, and George yielded rapidly to the influences which had been so powerful, and which he had been so determined to resist, when out of Routh's presence and under the sway of his penitence and his determination to reform. The conversation of Routh asserted all its old charm; the man's consummate knowledge of the world, his varied experience, the perfect refinement and tact which he could display at will, the apparent putting off of old things, the tone of utter respectability which enabled George's newly-sharpened conscience to consent to the fascination as readily as his predilections, had more than ever an irresistible attraction for the young man. During dinner, which, in the altered state of affairs, involved the presence of the servant, Routh kept the conversation almost entirely to Dallas's own doings, plans, and prospects. He knew Amsterdam well, and talked of Dutch art and the history of the Low Countries with much skill and fluency. Without an allusion which could supply material for the curiosity and the gossip of the servants, he made George understand that the Bohemian element had been com-

pletely banished from his life and its associations ; he sketched a plan of London life for George, moderately prosperous, quite practical, and entirely inoffensive. He made him, in short, as ready to congratulate himself on the resumption of their intimacy in the present phase of his moral being as he had been to rejoice in its formation under former conditions.

Routh's spirits rose with his senses. He felt a depraved pride in the devilish skill he possessed in his grand faculty of deception. He excelled in it, he revelled in its exercise, and he had not enjoyed it, in this orthodox way, of late. He had been making money, it is true, and doing some real work as well as a good deal of swindling in the process, but he had had only the opportunity of using a certain set of his faculties. His persuasive eloquence, his personal influence, his skilful and expansive but shrewd falsehood had lain dormant for some time. As a singer who has lost his voice for a time suddenly finds the liquid notes filling the air with all their accustomed power and sweetness, and exults in the recovered faculty, so Stewart Routh marked the pleasure, the enthusiasm, almost enabling George to forget the coming painful topic of discussion from which only a few minutes divided them, as he listened to the voice of the charmer, who had never before charmed him so wisely nor so well.

At length the wine was set upon the table, and then they were alone ; and by this time, so complete did Routh feel his resumption of power over George Dallas, that it was with indifference only very little feigned that he said :

"And now, George, let us go into this sad business about poor Deane. It has quite floored Harriet, as I dare say you guessed."

"And so you give me the same counsel as Harriet has given me," said George, when he had to tell his story all over again, and had worked himself up into a new fit of excitement over the horror of the murder, and the dreadful idea of the ignorance of the deed in which the dead man's relatives still remained.

"I do, indeed, George," said Routh, solemnly : "in taking any other course you will expose yourself to certain difficulty, and, indeed, to imminently probable danger. While you have been telling all this, I have been thinking how fortunate it was that I was

away at the time, and so down upon my luck that I never knew or thought about any public affairs, and so did not hear of the murder except in the vaguest way. In the peculiar lustre of our London civilization, you know, George, somebody found dead in the river is so frequent a mote, that nobody thinks about it.'

"Not in a general way," said George; "but they made so much of this, and were so confident that it was a political affair, I cannot understand how any of us escaped hearing of it."

"Yes," acquiesced Routh, "it is very extraordinary, but such things do happen. And rather fortunate, it seems, that they do, for if I had dropped in on the inquest, it would have been very awkward for you."

"Why?" said George; "after all, the truth must have come out, and all this misery about my mother would have been avoided."

An evil look from Routh's eye lighted for a moment on the young man's unconscious face, then glanced away, as he said:

"You forget that all I could have said must have strongly favoured the notion that the man who wore the coat which the waiter swore to, and was last seen with Deane, was the last person who ever saw him alive. If I had had time to think, of course I shouldn't have said a word about it; but if I had been hurried into speaking, that is what I must have said. Come, George, you are much too sensitive about this matter. Of course, I'm sorry for Deane, but I care a great deal more for you, and I decline to look at any part of this matter except such as concerns you. As to his relatives, as that part of the business appears to distress you most keenly, I must set your mind at rest by informing you that he had not a near relation in the world."

"Indeed!" said George. "How do you know?"

"He told me so," said Routh. "You will say, perhaps, that is not very trustworthy evidence, but I think we may take it in this particular instance for more than its general worth. He was the coldest, hardest, most selfish fellow I ever knew in the whole course of my experience, which has included a good deal of scoundrelism, and he seemed so thoroughly to appreciate the advantages of such isolation, that I believe it really did exist."

"He was certainly a mystery in every way," said George. "Where did he live? We never knew him—at least I never did—except loafing about at taverns, and places of the kind."

"I don't know where he lived," said Routh; "he never gave me an address, or a rendezvous, except at some City eating-house, or West-end billiard-room."

"How very extraordinary that no one recognized the description! It was in every way remarkable, and the fur-lined coat must have been known to some one. If I had seen any mention of the murder, I should have remembered that coat in a moment."

"Would you?" said Routh. "Well, it would have thrown me off the scent, for I never happened to see it. An American coat, no doubt. However, I have a theory, which I think you will agree with, and which is this: I suspect he had been living somewhere in another name—he told me he wasn't always known by that of Deane—under not very creditable circumstances, and as he must have had some property, which, had he been identified, must have been delivered up to the authorities, those in the secret have very wisely held their tongues."

"You think there was a woman in the case?"

Routh smiled a superior smile.

"Of course I think so; and knowing as much or as little of the man as you and I know, we are not likely to blame her much for consulting her own interests exclusively. This seems a curious case to us, because we happen to know about it; but just think, in this enormous city, in this highly criminal age, how common such things must be. How many persons may not have dropped out of existence since you and I last met, utterly unknown and uncared for, amid the mass of human beings here? It is no such rare thing, George, believe me, and you must listen to reason in this matter, and not run absurd risks to do an imaginary piece of justice."

This was Harriet's counsel merely put in colder, more worldly words. Routh watched his listener keenly as he gave it, and saw that his purpose was gained. He would have been glad now to have turned the conversation into some other channel; and did partially succeed in directing it to Dallas's literary prospects and

intentions, but only for a time. George pertinaciously came back to the murder, to his mother's state, to his apprehensions that she might never recover, and to his altered feelings towards Mr Carruthers.

Routh made very effective use of the latter topic. He enlarged upon the pride and sensitiveness of Mr Carruthers; adverted to the pleasure with which, in case of her recovery, his mother would hail the better state of things for which Mr Carruthers's letter to his step-son, combined with George's adoption of a new and steady career, would afford an opening; and congratulated George upon having been saved from taking any step which, by bringing public notice upon himself in so terrible a matter, must have incensed the proud man, and irritated him against him incalculably.

George was amenable to this line of reasoning, and with only occasional divergence from the main topic of their discourse, the evening passed away, and the two men parted for the night, it having been agreed that Harriet should be taken into consultation in the morning, and a well-considered letter written to Mr Carruthers.

George Dallas was in the dining-room on the following morning before Routh and Harriet came in, and he found a letter directed to himself, in a hand with which he was unacquainted, on the breakfast-table. He broke the seal with some alarm and much curiosity. A slip of paper folded round two thin limp letters formed the enclosure; it bore only the words: "My dear boy, I forgot to give you these letters. You had better read them. I think they are from your uncle.—E. B."

George sat down by the window, through which the soft air of a morning bright and beautiful even in London came refreshingly in. He looked at the postmarks of the two letters, and broke the seal of that which bore the earliest date first. As he read the letter, which was long, and closely written, an occasional exclamation escaped him, and when he had finished its perusal, he threw it hastily down, and impatiently tore open the other. This one, on the contrary, was brief; he had read the few lines it contained in a few minutes, with a face expressive of the utmost astonish-

ment, when Harriet, whose noiseless step had escaped his hearing, entered the room.

Without pausing to exchange the customary greeting, she came quickly towards him, and asked him "What was the matter? Had he any bad news?"

"Not bad news, but most astonishing, most unexpected news, Mrs Routh. These letters have been sent to me from Poynings; they are written to my mother by my uncle, her only brother, and they announce his immediate arrival in England. How fortunate that Ellen should have sent them to me! But I don't know what to do about sending the news to my mother. She ought to know it. What can I do?"

"Communicate with Mr Carruthers at once, George," said Harriet, in the tone of quiet decision with which she was accustomed to settle matters submitted to her judgment. "He is with her, and knows what she can bear. Sit down now and have some breakfast, and tell me about this uncle of yours. I never heard you mention him."

She took her place at the head of the table. She was dressed, as he had been accustomed to see her, with neatness and taste; there was no change in her appearance in that respect, yet there was a change—a change which had struck George painfully yesterday, and which, in the midst of all the agitation of to-day, he could not keep from noticing.

"Are you well, Mrs Routh?" he asked her, anxiously. "Are you sure you are well? I don't like your looks."

"Never mind my looks, George," Harriet said, cheerfully; "I am very well. Get on with your breakfast and your story. Routh will be here presently, and I want to know all about it before he comes. He gets impatient at my feminine curiosity, you know."

The smile with which she spoke was but the ghost of her former smile, and George still looked at her strangely, but he obeyed her, and proceeded with his breakfast and his story.

"I don't know very much about my mother's family," he said, "because they did not like her marriage with my father, and she kept aloof from them, and her parents were dead before she had the opportunity of appeasing them by making the fine match they

would have considered her marriage with Mr Carruthers to be. I know that some of their relatives were settled in America,—some at New York, some in South Carolina,—and my mother's brother, Mark Felton—queer name, puritanical and fanatical, with a touch of the association of assassination about it—was sent out to New York when quite a child. I forgot to tell you it was my mother's step-father and her mother who objected to her first marriage—her own father died when she was an infant; and on her mother's second marriage with a Mr Creswick—a poor, proud, dissipated fellow, I fancy, though I never heard much about him—the American branch of the family sent for the boy. My mother has told me they would have taken her too, and her step-father would not have made the least objection—we haven't been lucky in step-fathers, Mrs Routh—but her mother would not stand it; and so she kept her child. Not for many years, for she married my father when she was only seventeen. Her brother was just twenty then, and had been taken into the rich American firm of his relatives, and was a prosperous man. She knew very little of him, of course. I believe he took the same view of her marriage as her mother had taken; at all events, the first direct communication between them took place when my mother was left a handsome and poor young widow, with one boy, who did not make much delay about proving himself the graceless and ungrateful son you know him to have been."

George's voice faltered, and an expression of pain crossed his face. Harriet looked at him kindly, and laid her soft white hand on his.

"That is all over, you know," she said. "You will not err in that way again."

"But the consequences, Mrs Routh, the consequences. Think of my mother *now*. However," and he drew a long breath, and threw his shoulders back, like a man who tries to shift a burden, "I must go on with my story. There's not much more to tell, however. My mother might have had a home for herself and me in her brother's house, but she could not bear dependence, and has told me often that she regarded unknown relatives as the most formidable kind of strangers. Her brother's wife made him re-

sent my mother's determination to remain in England, and do the best she could for us both on our small means. Of course, all this was an old story long before I knew anything about it, and I fancy that it is only lately any correspondence has taken place between my mother and her brother. From this letter" (he touched the first he had read) "I can divine the nature of that correspondence. My mother," said George, sadly, "has appealed to her brother on behalf of her prodigal son, and her brother has told her his sorrows in return; they have been heavy, and in one respect not unlike her own. He, too, has an only son, and seems to find little happiness in the fact."

"Did you not know of your cousin's existence until now?" asked Harriet.

"O yes, I knew of it, in a kind of way; in fact, I just knew he existed, and no more. I don't think my mother knew more. I fancy in some previous letter he told her of his wife's death, and the general unsatisfactoriness of Arthur."

"He—your uncle, I mean—is then a widower."

"Yes," replied George. "I won't bother you with the whole of this long letter, Mrs Routh; the gist of it is this: My cousin, Arthur Felton, is not a good son, nor a good anything, I fancy, for I find my uncle congratulating my mother on my affection for her, my good feeling, in spite of all—(bless the poor man! he little knew how his words would wound, and how ill-deserved is the extenuation!)—and prophesying all manner of good things about me. It appears this hopeful son of his has been in Europe for some months, and probably in London for some months too, as my uncle says—stay, here is the passage: "Arthur has with him a letter of introduction to you and Mr Carruthers, some trifles from this side of the world which I thought you might like, and my instructions to make his cousin's acquaintance as soon as possible. You speak of George as living habitually in London; I hope by this time they have met, are good friends, and are, perhaps, chumming together. I have not heard from Arthur for some time. He is a careless correspondent, and not at any time so regardful of the feelings of other people as he might be. I dare say the first intelligence I shall have of him from England, as he cannot possibly

want money'—that looks bad, Mrs Routh," said George, breaking off abruptly, and looking up at her; "that looks bad—'as he cannot possibly want money, will be from you. I know you will receive him kindly, and I earnestly hope he may make a favourable impression on Mr Carruthers.'" Here George left off reading the letter, and looked blankly at Harriet.

"And he has never presented himself at Poynings, has he?" she asked.

"Never, that I know of; and of course Ellen Brookes would have told me, if he had. Besides, you see this letter was late for the mail, and arrived with this other one. My mother never saw either, and they have been lying more than six weeks at Poynings."

"No doubt your cousin is still in Paris. All Americans delight in Paris. He would be in no hurry to leave Paris, depend on it, if he had no more interesting acquaintance than that of an aunt and a cousin to make in London, and as much time before him as he chose."

"I should think with you, Mrs Routh, only that this letter, written at New York on the 3rd of April, says my uncle had heard from Arthur, who had merely written him a line from London, saying: 'Here I am. Particulars by next mail.' The mail brought no particulars, and my uncle writes to my mother, subsequently to this long letter, which is cheerful enough, you'll observe, that he is a prey to a presentiment that something is wrong with Arthur, also that he has conceived the strongest wish to come to England and see her, and especially to see me—that he has sufficient money and leisure to gratify the inclination—that he will wait for the chance of further intelligence of Arthur, and to arrange certain business matters, a month longer, and then come to England. He seems to have formed a remarkably elementary notion of my respected step-father's manners, customs, and general disposition, for he proposes to present himself at Poynings immediately on his arrival, and never appears to entertain the least misgiving as to the cordiality of his reception. He must have been astonished at getting no answer to either letter, and I should think

must have had his presentiments considerably sharpened and strengthened by the fact."

Here George referred to the date of the later of the two letters, and exclaimed :

"By Jove ! I should not be surprised if he were at Poynings now !"

At this moment Routh entered the room, and, in his turn, had the new aspect of affairs explained to him, but at no great length. He displayed very little interest in the matter, thought it very probable that Mr Felton might have arrived in England, or even at Poynings, but did not see what George could do in that case.

"You can't go and entertain another man at a house where you haven't the entrée yourself," he said. "I suppose the old woman will let you know if he really comes to Poynings. In the mean time, send the letters on to Mr Carruthers. You expect to get his address from some girl or other—his niece, I think I understood Harriet—and ask what is to be done. It's rather a lucky turn up, Dallas, I take it, and will help your good-boy intentions towards your step-father wonderfully, to have a rich uncle to act as a connecting-link between you. By the by, he's sure to set you up in life, George, and periodical literature will be robbed of a shining luminary."

George did not altogether like the tone in which all this was said. It was a little sneering, and altogether careless. Nothing was so difficult to Routh, as it always is to men of his class, as the sustained assumption of interest in any affairs but their own ; and now that his anxieties of the previous day were relieved, and he had no immediate object in which Dallas was concerned, to gain, he was impatient of any interruption of his immediate pursuits, and harsh and rough with him. He sat down, and ate his breakfast hastily, while he read a heap of letters which lay beside his plate.

"I don't know, indeed," George had replied good-humouredly to the speech which had jarred upon him ; "but you are busy, Routh, and I won't trouble you with my business just now. Mrs Routh and I will discuss the letter to Mr Carruthers."

"A telegram for Mr Dallas," said the irreproachable servant, who entered the room while George was speaking. "Please to sign this, sir."

Routh looked up from his letters, Harriet set down the teapot, and quietly taking up the slip of paper which the man had laid upon the table by George's elbow, signed it with his name, writing it with a pencil which hung at her waist. The servant left the room, and George said :

"I was not wrong. This is from my uncle, and it comes from Amherst. He says : 'Meet me at Morley's Hotel this evening, at six.'"

"Very odd," said Routh. "Well, George, I am sure I wish you all manner of luck with your American uncle."

He had taken up his hat and gloves as he spoke, and now rang for the servant, whom he directed to call a hansom. The man went to the door, and transferred the commission to a street-boy lingering about there, who ran off, and returned in two minutes with the required vehicle. George and Routh were standing on the steps as the boy reappeared, talking. They shook hands, and Routh was stepping into the cab, when George followed him, and said, in a whisper :

"Was it not extraordinary the boy did not recognize poor Deane?"

"What boy?" said Routh, in astonishment, and stepping back on to the flagway.

"Why, that boy ; the boy you always employ. He brought you my message the other day. Don't you remember it was he brought your note to poor Deane that day at the tavern?"

"I did not remember ; I did not particularly notice," said Routh. "Good-bye." And he jumped into the cab, and was driven away.

George went back into the house, eyed curiously by Jim Swain, who touched his cap as he passed.

CHAPTER XXII.

LOOKING OUT ON THE TAUNUS.

It was a beautiful day in the early autumn, and though "all the world" had not yet mustered at Homburg von der Höhe, though the hotel of "Quarter Sessions" had not yet a tithe of the illustrious names for contribution to the visitors' list which it was destined to have, the scene presented by the little white town in its setting of green—a green nearer to emerald than any between itself and the shores of Dublin Bay—was gay, striking, pleasant, and varied. Groups of fluttering dresses, whose wearers were further adorned with perfect boots and exquisite hats, and could, for the most part, boast of the attractions of youth and prettiness, were abroad in the alleys, under the shade of the slim, graceful trees. The sounds of distant music from the bands dispersed about for the delectation of the visitors, and those of glad, careless voices in such leisure talk as suited the scene and the season, mingled themselves, and came floating in on the warm air at the open windows to regale the ears of such as had not gone out to share in the busy idleness of the majority of the sojourners at the Baths.

At one of these open windows, which looked out upon a pretty prim little garden, bordered on the confines of the broad shady alley down to which it stretched by some trees nobler and more rich in foliage than their fellows, the strollers in the alley might have observed three gentlemen in earnest and protracted conversation. One was seated in a large arm-chair, which occupied one of the sides of the bay-window; a second leaned against the open frame of the central compartment; and the third, a shorter and slighter man than either of his companions, stood upright between them, and as he spoke turned his head and his keen eyes from one to the other with an animated and characteristic gesture. The gentleman seated in the arm-chair was a tall, frostily gray, scrupulously dressed, laboriously polite elderly man, who constantly twirled a heavy gold eye-glass in very white and bony

hands. He seemed agitated—indeed, so much so, that some of his acquaintances in the far-off English district which had the honour of being his home would have found some difficulty in recognizing him. He was hardly pompous as he sat this fine morning looking out on the Taunus, and taking note of neither mountain, nor valley, nor forest; his manner was actually that of a man seeking and welcoming sympathy; it really seemed possible that an observer of the scene might have ventured on taking the liberty of feeling sorry for Mr Carruthers of Poynings.

The smaller, slighter man, who formed the centre figure of the group, was of somewhat remarkable aspect. Very wiry and alert of frame, well knit and upright, his figure had a certain youthfulness about it which was contradicted by his face—that of a man who had passed the confines of middle age. His face was handsome, thoughtful, and bore the impress of heavy trouble, and in the dark eyes, and generally in the straight and refined features, it presented a strong resemblance to that of Mrs Carruthers.

Not unnaturally, for the gentleman in question was Mark Felton, Mrs Carruthers's brother.

The third component of the group, a young man, who leant against the frame of the open window and looked out, his face turned away from the speaker and the "other listener," his tall loosely-built figure distinctly visible from the road, was George Dallas.

"Under these circumstances, and seeing that waiting was inevitable, and that I could do nothing in that matter actively," Mark Felton was saying, "I determined to come on here at once. All I heard at Poynings—"

"I hope you were properly entertained there?" said Mr Carruthers, in the old "of Poynings" manner.

"Perfectly, my dear sir—perfectly. As I was saying, all I heard at Poynings, and what George told me"—he cast a quick glance at his nephew here, in which there was already hearty liking—"made me more than ever anxious to see Laura. Besides, I was exceedingly anxious to make your acquaintance without any further delay."

"A wish which I reciprocated, I assure you, Mr Felton."

"In bringing George with me, I acted on my own judgment, and on a conviction that you would regard the matter as I do. I believed you would consider him entitled to see his mother, and would be glad to learn from me that his prospects in life are as much improved as his inclination and determination to do them honour are genuine and strong."

"You are quite right, Mr Felton," said the honourable old gentleman, who had begun to feel himself somehow beaten by fate, and was, secretly, immensely relieved that his step-son had made his appearance without having been sent for, and in such unexceptionable company. "It is necessary now that Mr Dallas—that—that George" (he got out the word with an immense effort, and it meant everything) "should be near his mother. I am glad to know he has found a friend in you."

"And I am still more glad to believe," said Mr Felton, not precisely interrupting Mr Carruthers, but taking advantage of a slight pause to speak—"I am glad to know that he found me just when he was learning to do without any one."

It is possible that a good deal of Mr Carruthers's trouble—and he had suffered severely since he had left England—had had its origin in a conviction, which had stolen upon him at first, and latterly had threatened to overwhelm him, that he had not been faultless in his conduct towards his wife and his treatment of her son. He had found out very shortly after they had left Poynings—for in the deadening of her faculties, forgetfulness of her fear of him had come—how mistaken he had been in supposing that he had suppressed her love for George, her constant remembrance of him, or had supplied by all he had given her for the boon he had withheld. In her placid way, when she would sit for hours talking softly to herself, his wife had administered some very telling lessons to Mr Carruthers. It was with an uneasy surprise that he came to feel how very dear she was to him, how indispensable to his life, how strangely the things which had held the first places in his estimation, behind which he had ranked her, and she had been content humbly to follow, fell away into complete insignificance. He actually forgot Poynings at times, and was not worried by fears that the lawn was not properly mown and smoothly rolled,

or by visions of fallen leaves lying about in the sacred places. His "business papers" were duly forwarded to him, but they did not interest him much; his mind dwelt almost entirely on his wife's state, and he was rapidly passing, as might be expected from a man whose moral perceptions had been suddenly awakened and enlarged, from the recognition of his true share of blame in the calamity which had befallen them, to an exaggeration of that share, which rendered him almost oblivious of the provocation he had received. Had George Dallas suddenly appeared before his step-father at Poynings, he might not have been well received; the influences of old habits and associations, in the sense of the promulgation of the old edict of banishment, might have successfully overpowered the new influences striving with pride and obstinacy in the by no means bad heart of Mr Carruthers. But the occasion had been most auspicious. Here, in a foreign place, where Mr Carruthers was positively oppressed with a sense of strangeness, and where no one was present to know anything about the concession he was making, he had but trifling difficulties to overcome, and the meeting between the three gentlemen had been kindly, unreserved, and cordial.

The report of his wife's condition, which Mr Carruthers had made to her son and brother, was not very reassuring, and was doubly distressing to George, in consequence of the stress which his step-father laid upon the good effect to be anticipated by his restoration to her. Had Mr Carruthers been in a less charitable frame of mind, he might have taken the silence and sadness with which George received his assurances on this point for sullenness; but he did not, he was actually learning to make allowance for the temperaments and the feelings of other people.

Mr Felton and his nephew had arrived at Homburg on the preceding evening, and Mr Felton had communicated by letter with Mr Carruthers, who had named an early hour on the following day for receiving his unknown brother-in-law and his little-known step-son. Their interview had lasted some time, when Mr Carruthers expressed his belief that good might result to his mother from seeing George.

The young man turned his face from the speaker, and made no answer.

"It will be necessary, of course, to have her physician's advice and permission in the first instance," said Mr Felton, "before either George or I can see her. I suppose she is in good hands here?"

"In the best possible," replied Mr Carruthers. "Dr Merle is famous in the treatment of these strange mental maladies; indeed, it was in order to consult him that I changed my plan, and came here instead of going to the south of France, as I had intended."

"So Miss Carruthers told me," said Mr Felton; which simple observation caused George Dallas to start perceptibly, and to turn abnormally red in the face.

"Indeed," said Mr Carruthers. "I did not know you had seen my niece."

"No?" said Mr Felton. "I suppose she left it to me to tell you of her prompt politeness to an intruder. When I had seen your housekeeper and learned all she could tell me, especially that my sister had not received my letters, and knew nothing of my return to England, I quickly made up my mind to join you abroad. Miss Carruthers being in correspondence with you, and therefore able to give me all the information I wanted, was clearly the person I ought to see, so I started for the Sycamores, saw her—and a very beautiful and charming girl she is—heard from her all she had to tell me, and then went up to town to make acquaintance with my nephew."

Mr Carruthers felt and looked rather conscious and uneasy while Mr Felton was making this explanation. Clare had a considerable involuntary share in the self-reproach and regret he was experiencing. His wife had been, to a certain extent, sacrificed to her, and the remembrance disconcerted him. As for George, where was all his resentment against his step-father now? Where was all his exultation that he and destiny united had outwitted the proud and pompous old tyrant, as he had called him in his thoughts, and brought about a meeting, which his inner consciousness told him had had no trifling result for either, between him

and the jealously-guarded heiress? It augured well for George's future that he felt deeply sorry at the moment the girl's name was mentioned that his step-father had sustained this unintentional and unknown wrong at his hands. As things were going now, he and Clare might have met, in all probability, openly and blamelessly; and George felt, in his altered mood, that he would willingly part with the romance and mystery which now attended their acquaintance to escape from the sense that he had been uncandid, that he had misled the girl by her ardent fancy, and under the temptation of resentment against his step-father. It was too late now, as George felt bitterly, for such regret; the future would enable him only so far to retrieve the past as the most scrupulous abstinence from availing himself of the opportunity whose occurrence he now regretted might retrieve it. Clare would probably know him in his true character soon; for he saw at once that Mr Carruthers, having taken the generous resolution, had taken it thoroughly; and she would despise him for the deceit he had practised towards her, forgetting, in his hot-headed resentment against her uncle, and infatuation with herself, that such knowledge must come, and such contempt come with it. Heavily the punishment of the past was falling upon George Dallas, even in this hour of reconciliation, or rehabilitation, of absolute good fortune. His uncle had been impressed in his favour beyond his expectations; he had learned not to expect much from young men and only sons; and George had been perfectly candid with him, so that the elder man had gained an insight into his character, full of encouragement and hope. Mr Felton had told him that he should make his future safe, so far as pecuniary independence could secure it; and though George had suffered severely from want of money, and knew well from how much evil he might have been preserved by its possession, he did not over-estimate the extent of that security; so that the tide of fortune had indeed turned for the prodigal son. But the husks were still between his teeth, and bitter in his mouth. There were two women in the world infinitely dear to him, and he had injured them both: the one, probably, mortally; the other basely, as he now knew and felt—how severely, time alone could tell. The fortune with

which his uncle would endow him could not purchase the reversal of these facts ; the respectability with which he could cover the past could not efface that stain.

"As a man soweth, so shall he reap ;" and harvest-time was heavy for George.

Thus thinking, George's attention had wandered from the conversation between the others, and was only recalled by Mr Felton's addressing him directly.

"Your mother was always in possession of your address, George, was she not ?"

"Certainly," replied George, "until lately—until her illness. I left London for Amsterdam just before it commenced, and did not hear from or write to her, beyond a few lines, until I got your letter, sir," turning to Mr Carruthers.

"That decides it, you see," continued Mr Felton, in pursuance of the remarks which George had not heard. "My sister evidently never received any letter or message from Arthur, or, as you suggest, she would have put George in communication with him. I can only conclude that he left England again to return to some of his continental haunts—they were not too reputable," said Mr Felton bitterly—"and has not yet returned. I must only wait, and for every reason I had better wait here."

"Certainly," said Mr Carruthers. "I am very sorry you should have anything to distress you, in addition to my wife's illness, in coming to England, especially in connection with your son."

A footman—one of the "suite" who had attended Mr and Mrs Carruthers of Poynings on their departure from that deserted locality—now entered, and announced that Dr Merle had arrived. As it had been previously arranged that Mr Carruthers should consult that high authority in their absence, the uncle and nephew took their hats and went out into the prim little garden, whence they reached the shady road. There they paced up and down, passing and passed by the groups of loungers, some of whom were attracted by the preoccupied and serious air with which the two gentlemen conversed.

"If I did not know that he had sufficient money to last for a longer time than I have been without news of him, and also that

he has a happy knack of making money wherever he may be, in some way or other, I should at once communicate with the police," Mr Felton was saying.

"Yes," said George; "but the worst of it is, we don't know what police to communicate with, whether English or foreign. If he had not taken his money out of the Liverpool bank, we might suppose him to be in England; but that looks conclusive, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does," said Mr Felton. "The only clue I have is the fact that he did draw the money, and wrote me the line I told you of"—he opened his pocket-book mechanically as he spoke, glanced at a letter placed within the leaves, replaced the book in his breast-pocket, and went on—"promising further particulars. It is almost incredible that he should be in England, and not have written again. My letters to him, addressed to the Liverpool bank, have not been sent for. He got one when he drew the money."

"Yes, I know," said George. They had talked the matter over many times, and never drew nearer a conclusion. It was evident to George, on the present occasion, that the character of his uncle's apprehensions was undergoing a change. At first, he had treated his son's silence as only one additional example of the utter callousness and indifference to which the father was only too well accustomed. George, to whom his cousin was an utter stranger, had accepted his uncle's view of the matter, at first, unquestioned; but he had become unsatisfied and uncertain about it of late, and was anxious, without alarming Mr Felton, to lead him to take active steps for obtaining information of the whereabouts of his son.

"I feel satisfied he left England again, and knows nothing of my movements. He will write out to New York, however; and if he has only done so now, there will be some delay before he knows I am in Europe."

"Don't you think," asked George, hesitatingly, "he would send to Liverpool for the letters, if he were in any uncertainty, before writing to New York? I confess I don't like his leaving them unclaimed. None of the reasons which may explain his silence

reach to an explanation of that. I don't think you ought to let much more time go over. If you had a likeness of him—" He hesitated very much here, and looked aside at his uncle, who turned sharply towards him, and said :

"Well! What! If I had a likeness—"

"You might have had it copied, and the photographs distributed to the police ; so that, if anything should be wrong—"

"Wrong? In what sense, George? Do you begin to fear that anything has happened to him? You never said so at first."

"Because I did not think so, uncle ; and I am not seriously uneasy now—not at all ; but I think a reasonable time has elapsed, and we ought now to make active inquiry. When he turns up, and finds out what trouble and anxiety he has given, he will be more considerate in future."

"Ah," said Mr Felton, with a sigh, "I don't think Arthur is open to any conviction of that kind. What do you think it best to do, now?"

"Well, uncle, you see you have been three weeks in Europe, and those three weeks make a considerable addition to the time since you heard from him. If you write by the next mail to New York for a copy of his photograph— You are sure you have not one with you?"

"Quite sure. Since I found I had not one in my desk, I have searched everywhere among my luggage, but I have not one."

"Well, then, if you write by this mail for a copy, and it is sent by return mail, if he has not turned up in the mean time, and things go on well here, I think you had better put the matter into the hands of the police. It is true you do not know whether Arthur is in England now, or abroad ; but the last place in which you know him to have been is London, and from that information they must work."

"True," said Mr Felton ; and then continued, in a slow reluctant tone, "I shrink from it, I confess. A matter which is placed in the hands of the police always implies something disgraceful ; and though I don't expect to find that Arthur has disposed of his time and his money very creditably, I don't like to

make so sure of it as I feel convinced a close investigation will make me."

Mr Felton spoke with some agitation, and George thrilled with a mingled feeling of pity and dread, he did not know of what. But he said, cheerily :

"Well, sir, let us hope there will be no occasion for making any such investigation. You can't have an answer for nearly three weeks, and a great deal may happen in that time. Arthur may be here long before then, to answer for himself, and laugh at us for our anxiety about such a citizen of the world, old and new."

"I don't like it," George thought, as he walked on in silence by the side of his uncle—"I don't like it. And it's very plain I am not the only black sheep in the family flock, nor, I suspect, the blackest. I will see that he writes to New York ; and I will tell Routh all about this when he comes, and hear what he says. My uncle will not mind my telling him now, I dare say."

"When do you expect your friends, George?" asked Mr Felton, striking the chord of George's thought, after the fashion which every one knows and nobody can explain.

"To-morrow, or the day after, sir," replied George. "Routh wrote from Paris yesterday."

"I am sorry for Mrs Routh," said Mr Felton ; "she's too-secrefitive and too cautious, too silent and too cunning, for my fancy ; but she is an interesting woman and a wonderfully good wife, I am sure, though of the stony order."

"That is come to her lately," said George, in an eager tone, "since her health has failed so much. You cannot imagine what a different creature she was only a little while ago. She was as bright as the sunshine and as gay as a lark. She is, indeed, a wonderful wife—the most devoted I ever knew ; and her usefulness in everything, in all a woman's ordinary ways and in many quite extraordinary, in all Routh's business matters, is marvellous. Even her delicate health, though she has lost her good looks very much, and her spirits quite, has not made any alteration in that. I cannot conceive what Routh would do without her."

"H'm ! I wonder if *he* is quite so uncertain," said Mr Felton.

drily, and to George's surprise. "I don't like your friend, and I don't trust him."

"What do you mean?" asked George. "Don't trust him? Do you mean that you don't trust his feelings or his conduct to Harriet?"

"Precisely so, my dear boy. Mrs Routh is a devoted wife; but I am very much mistaken—and remember I have been playing looker-on for a fortnight or so, and interested in my part, too, considering what you told me about yourself and these people—if she is not a very unhappy one. I do not pretend to explain my convictions, but I am quite clear about them. She loves Routh—that's plain enough—but she is miserable with him."

"Do you really think so? She is dreadfully changed, I know, but I thought it might be only in consequence of her ill health. Miserable with him! At all events, he is not unkind to her. I know he is very anxious about her health; for he has left London, at much inconvenience and great risk of loss, to bring her here for the waters."

"And for a turn at the gaming-tables for himself, I fancy. Routh has to me the air of a man who has been constrained into temporary respectability, and is heartily tired of it."

"I am sorry you have so bad an opinion of him, sir," said George, who could not resist an uneasy impression that his uncle was right, and that the experiment of a renewed intimacy with Routh was not likely to be brilliantly successful, "for I was thinking of consulting him about the best way of finding out Arthur's whereabouts."

"No, no," said Mr Felton, quickly and emphatically; "say nothing to him about any business of mine; give the man no pretext to fasten an intimacy upon me. We want no cleverness of his kind in our work."

"Very well, sir," said George. He was discontented with his uncle, because he had formed what the young man knew in his heart was a just opinion of Routh, and discontented with himself because he could not combat it. "Of course I will speak of your

affairs to no one without your permission. But one thing I must say for Routh, I do think he loves his wife."

"And I think he hates her," said Mr Felton.

They had turned in their walk, and were close by the little garden gate as he uttered these words. At that moment it opened, and a servant appeared. He told the two gentlemen that Mr Carruthers wished to see them, and they followed him silently into the house.

* * * * *

"I am quite clear that the experiment may be tried with safety and advantage," said Dr Merle, at the close of a long conversation with Mr Felton and George Dallas. Dr Merle was an elderly gentleman, with a bald head, a thin face, and eyes as piercing, as strong, and as resolute as those of an eagle; a sort of man to be "quite clear" about his ideas and decisions in general. "I have felt persuaded all along that the state of Mrs Carruthers's nervous system was produced by a shock, though Mr Carruthers had no knowledge of the fact, and could supply me with no particulars."

Here was a pretty state of things; Mr Carruthers of Poynings obliged to listen to a stranger informing him that his own wife had received a shock on his own premises without his knowledge, confirming the opinions of two other presuming individuals, and totally indifferent to the effect upon his feelings. But Mr Carruthers of Poynings bore it wonderfully well. He actually nodded acquiescence towards the presumptuous doctor, and did not feel in the least angry.

"Yes," repeated Dr Merle, emphatically, "there has been a shock, no doubt about it. The nerves are still very weak, very much shaken, but the general health so much re-established, that I do not anticipate anything but the best results from the attempt to communicate a pleasant and happy impression to Mrs Carruthers, though, owing to her distressing state just now, that impression must necessarily take the form of a shock also. But"—and Dr Merle smiled, and looked at each of his hearers in turn—"I think you will agree with me, gentlemen, that there is little, if any, reliable evidence that any one was ever killed or hurt by an agreeable surprise. Mr Carruthers has been so good as to convey to

me that it would be an agreeable surprise to my patient to see him and her son together, and I am quite clear that the sooner the experiment is tried, and that Mrs Carruthers knows there is also another pleasure in store for her"—with a bow to Mr Felton—"the better."

George stood up, and followed his step-father mechanically. His conviction, from the first moment he had heard of his mother's state, had been strong that she would be roused to recollection by the sight of him, and restored to a condition which would permit him to dissipate the delusion which had so terribly affected her. He only knew the secret—he only could undo the ill. Should this fail, he would reveal all to Mr Felton and to his step-father, whose altered conduct to him had removed the danger of any ill results to his mother from such a revelation.

Mr Carruthers preceded George across a wide corridor to a large and airy room, where the windows were wide open—where white curtains fluttered in the air, scented by the breath of flowers. Just inside the door he motioned to George to remain there, and then approached a large chair, whose high back hid its occupant from George's sight. He stooped over the chair, and said, in a softer voice than the Poynings household had been accustomed to hear :

"Laura, I have brought some one to see you this morning."

George could not see from where he stood, but he concluded there was a sign of assent, for Mr Carruthers beckoned him rapidly forward, and the next instant he was by his side, and had seen his mother's face. Another, and his mother had started up, and, with a piercing cry of "George ! My son ! my son !" had fallen senseless into his arms.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS IRETON P. BEMBRIDGE

THE experiment which Dr Merle had sanctioned proved successful. The wise physician had calmed the apprehensions with which her husband and son regarded the swoon into which Mrs Carruthers had fallen upon recognizing George, and had hinted that on her recovery the mother and son should be left alone.

"The old gentleman," said Dr Merle to Mr Felton, "and a fine old gentleman he is—a little peculiar, but it would not do the world any harm to have a few more of this sort in it—has told me a good deal of the family history intentionally, and some of it unintentionally; and I have not the least doubt that the root of Mrs Carruthers's disease is simply her son."

"He has given her some trouble, I know," said Mark Felton, with a sigh; "but hardly so much as that comes to, I fancy."

"Well, well, I won't be positive; but I think so. No young man ever tells all the truth about his follies; and, indeed, no middle-aged or old man, for that matter; and rely upon it, his mother knows more than any one else. She will do well, Mr Felton. She sees him all right, no matter how wrong he may have been; there's nothing gravely amiss now. We may leave her to time now, and her son's society."

"Do you think I may venture to see her soon?"

"Impossible to say, for a day or two, my dear sir; impossible to say. Mr Carruthers and Mr Dallas must explain your coming to her. I don't prescribe *two* shocks, you know, even pleasant ones; and then I have no doubt you will perfect the cure."

Mr Felton acknowledged the smooth speech with an absent sort of smile, and Dr Merle took his leave.

"You are sure there is nothing wrong with you, George? You are quite sure you are in no danger?" said Mrs Carruthers, late in the afternoon of that day, to her son, as she lay quietly on a large sofa drawn close to the window, where the panes were glittering in the dying light. Her face was turned towards him,

her dark eyes a little troubled, and not so bright as they had been, resting fondly and with a puzzled expression upon his face, and one thin hand fondly clasped in his. George was lying on the floor beside her sofa, his head resting against her pillow, and the fingers of her other hand were moving softly among his rich brown curls.

"Nothing, indeed, mother. All is well with me—much, much better than I ever expected or hoped; but you must not agitate yourself, or ask any questions. Dr Merle and Mr Carruthers have put me on my honour not to talk to you of the past, and we must keep our word, you know;" and the young man tenderly kissed the hand he held in his.

"Yes, yes," she said, in an absent, searching tone; "but there is something—there was something—I—"

"Hush, mother! In the time to come you shall know everything, but for the present you must simply trust me. Indeed, there is nothing wrong. I am here with you, brought here and welcomed by Mr Carruthers. You remember that he did not like me, and he had good cause; yes, he had good cause, but that is all over now. I am here with his full sanction and approbation, and you must be content to know that, to feel it, and *to rest*. You have to get strong and well now, mother, and then we shall all be quite happy."

"Yes, George, yes. I can rest now," said his mother. And she nestled down upon her sofa, and he drew the coverings around her, and they both kept silence; and presently, in the autumnal evening, when the moon rose over the dark Taunus, and the lights began to sparkle all over the little white town, Mrs Carruthers fell asleep, with her hand clasped in that of her son and her worn but always handsome face resting against his brown curls.

The days went by, and with the lapse of each Mrs Carruthers made an advance towards the recovery of her health and her faculties. Very shortly after their meeting George had spoken to her of his uncle; and though he found it difficult to fix her attention or engage her interest, he succeeded in ascertaining that she remembered all the circumstances of her brother's life, and that he had expressed a wish and intention to come to England.

"Mark is not happy in his son," she said one day to Mr Carruthers and George, who had been talking to her by preconcerted arrangement on the subject. "I fear he has given him a great deal of trouble. I remember in many of his letters he said he was not blessed, like me, with a son of whom he could be proud."

George reddened violently as his mother's harmless words showed him how she had concealed all her grief from her brother, and struck him with sudden shame and confusion in his stepfather's presence. Mr Carruthers felt inexpressibly confused also; and as readiness was not the Grand Lama's forte, he blundered out:

"Well, my dear, never mind about his son. You would be glad to see your brother Mark, wouldn't you?"

Mrs Carruthers looked earnestly at him as she raised herself from her pillows, and the faint colour in her cheek deepened into a dark flush as she said:

"Glad to see my brother Mark! Indeed I should be. Is he here too?"

So, after long years, the brother and sister met again; and Mark Felton was a little diverted from his anxiety about his son by the interest and affection with which his sister inspired him, and the strong hold which George Dallas gained upon the affections of a man who had been sorely wounded in his own hopes and expectations. He was not under any mistaken impression about his nephew. He knew that George had caused his mother the deepest grief, and had for a long time gone as wrong as a young man could go short of entering on a criminal career. But he divided the good from the evil in his character; he discerned something of the noble and the generous in the young man; and if he laid too much to the account of circumstances, and handled his follies too tenderly, it was because he had himself suffered from all the grief which profligacy, combined with cold and calculating meanness, can inflict upon a parent's heart.

George Dallas yielded easily to the influence of happiness. His gay and pleasant manner was full of fascination, and of a certain easy grace which had peculiar charms for his Transatlantic uncle; and his love for his mother was a constant pleasure to her brother

to witness, and an irresistible testimony to the unspoiled nature of the son. True, this affection had not availed to restrain him formerly; but the partial uncle argued that circumstances had been against the boy, and that he had not had fair play. It was not very sound reasoning, but there was nothing to contradict it just at present, and Mr Felton was content to feel rather than to reason.

Mr and Mrs Routh had arrived at Homburg immediately after Mr Felton and George had reached that place of fashionable resort. Their lodgings were in a more central situation than those of Mr and Mrs Carruthers, and were within easy reach of all the means of diversion which the wicked little resort of the designing and their dupes commanded. George Dallas did not see much of Routh. He had been disturbed and impressed by Mr Felton's exceedingly emphatic expression of opinion respecting that gentleman; he had been filled with a vague regret, for which now and then he took himself to task, as ungrateful and whimsical, for having renewed his intimacy with Routh. His levity, his callousness, respecting the dreadful event concerning which he had consulted him, had shocked George at the time, and his sense of them had grown with every hour's consideration of the matter (and they were many) in which he had since engaged. Nothing had occurred to him to reverse or weaken the force of Routh's opinion; but he could not get over his heartlessness. They met, indeed, frequently. They met when George and his uncle, or his step-father, or both, walked about the town and its environs, or in the gardens; they met when George strolled about the salons of the Kursaal, religiously abstaining from play,—it was strange how the taste for it had passed away from him, and how little he suffered, even at first, in establishing the rule of self-restraint; but they rarely met in private, and they had not had half an hour's conversation in the week which had now elapsed since Routh and Harriet had arrived at Homburg.

But George had seen Harriet daily. Every afternoon he escorted his mother during her drive, and then he called on Mrs Routh. His visits tortured her, and yet they pleased her too. Above all, there was security in them. She should know everything he was

doing ; she should be quite sure no other influence, stronger, dangerous, was at work, while he came to her daily, and talked to her in the old frank way. Routh shrank from seeing him, as Harriet well knew, and felt, also, that there was security in his visits to her. "He will keep out of George's way, of course," she said to herself, when she acquiesced in the expediency of following Dallas to Homburg, and the necessity for keeping him strictly in sight, for some time at least. "He will not undertake the daily torture. No ; that, too, must be my share. Well, I am tied to the stake, and there is no escape ; only an interval of slumber now and then, more or less rare and brief. I don't want to tie him to it also—he could not bear it as I can."

And she bore it well—wonderfully well, on the whole, though the simile of bodily torture is not overdrawn as representing what she endured. By a sort of tacit mutual consent, they never alluded to Deane, or the discovery of the murder. George, who never could bear the sight of a woman's suffering, had a vivid recollection of the terrible emotion she had undergone when he disclosed the truth to her, and determined to avoid the subject for the future. She understood this, but she felt tolerably certain that if any new complication arose, if any occasion of doubt or hesitation presented itself, George would seek her advice. She should not be kept in ignorance, and that was enough. She had ascertained, before they left London, that George had not mentioned the matter to Mr Felton ; and when the young man told her how otherwise complete his explanation with Mr Felton had been, she felt a degree of satisfaction in the proof of her power and influence afforded by this reticence.

The positive injunction which Mr Felton had laid upon his nephew aided George's sensitiveness with respect to Harriet. He felt convinced that if his uncle had known her as he knew her, he would have been satisfied to confide to her the trouble and anxiety under which he laboured, and whose origin was assuming, to George's mind, increasing seriousness with every day which passed by without bringing news of Mr Felton's son. But he would not, however he might find relief and counsel by doing so,

discuss with Harriet a matter which he had been positively forbidden to discuss with her husband : he could not ask her secrecy without hurting her by an explanation of Mr Felton's ill opinion of Routh. So it happened that these two persons met every day, and that much liking, confidence, and esteem existed on the man's part towards the woman, and yet unbroken silence was maintained on the subject which deeply engaged the minds of both. Philip Deane's name was never mentioned by Harriet, nor did Dallas speak of Arthur Felton.

So Mrs Carruthers improved in health. Mr Carruthers was very gracious and affable to his step-son, and terribly nervous and anxious about his wife, on whom, if the worthy physician could have been brought to consent, he would have kept Dr Merle in perpetual attendance, being incapable of recognizing the importance—indeed, almost the existence—of any patient of that gentleman's, except Mrs Carruthers, of Poynings. Mr Felton heard nothing of his son, and waited, frequently discussing the subject with Mr Carruthers and his nephew ; and the bright sweet autumn days went on. Afterwards, when George reviewed their course, and pondered on the strange and wayward ways through which his life had lain, he thought of the tranquillity, the lull there had been in that time, with wonder.

The change of scene, the physical effort, a certain inevitable deadening effect produced by the lapse of time, more powerful in cases of extreme excitement than its space would seem to warrant, had had their effect on Harriet's spirits and appearance. She looked more like herself, George thought, when he came to make her his daily visit. Perhaps he had become more accustomed to the change he had noted with solicitude on his return to London ; she was certainly more cheerful. He did not take account of the fact that he did not see her in Routh's company, though his uncle's comment on her husband's feelings towards her frequently and painfully recurred to him. Harriet questioned him frequently about his mother, and George, full of gratitude for her kindness and sympathy, spoke freely of her, of his uncle, of the altered position in which he stood with his step-father, and of his im-

proved condition and hopes. There were only two persons of interest to him whom he did not mention to Harriet. They were Arthur Felton and Clare Carruthers.

"Have you ever been to the Kursaal in the evening?" he asked Harriet one day, as they were talking, and looking at the groups of gaily-dressed men and women lounging past the window where they were seated.

"Yes, I have gone in there once or twice with Stewart; but I got tired of it very soon, and I don't want to go again."

"My uncle met an old acquaintance there last evening," George went on; "he does not particularly care about it either; but we were strolling about the gardens until rather late, and then we went in and had a look at the ball-room. I had been watching a lady for some time, out-and-out the best dancer in the room, when she came up to my uncle and spoke to him, and I find out she is quite a celebrity here."

"Indeed," said Harriet, not vehemently interested.

"Yes, quite," said George; "and judging by what my uncle says, I should think she was a celebrity in New York too. I should like to show her to you, Mrs Routh; she is like one of those impossible women in the American novels, with clusters of currants made in carbuncles, and bunches of cherries in flawless rubies, in their hair—you know the kind of thing I mean. I fancy the Phoenix would look shy about insuring her wardrobe, and Hancock feel dubious about matching her diamonds. Such a twinkling, flashing, glittering, coaxing, flippant mortal I never met in my life. I wonder if she dresses as gorgeously under the sunshine as under the gas."

"She has quite taken your fancy, George. Did Mr Felton introduce you?"

"Yes. There she stood, looking up in his face, but I am quite sure seeing me and every other person in the room at the same time, and chattering like a Yankee magpie; so my uncle presented me to—Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, as he called her, in American fashion. She was there, with a whole host of people, and I didn't fancy them, 'ke-inder didn't,' as she would say, no doubt, and went away as soon as I could."

"Is she a widow?"

"Yes—at least, I think so; I heard nothing of Ireton P."

"She will be cultivating your uncle, or yourself, George. A handsome, rich young widow, and an old acquaintance of your uncle's, eh?"

"I don't feel in the least like it, Mrs Routh, and I am sure the sparkling, flashing, dashing lady I met last night would fly at no such mean quarry. I have rather a notion, too, that my uncle does not like her."

"Have you? Did he seem displeased at the meeting?"

"Not exactly displeased—but—but I am beginning to understand him now wonderfully well, and in some things he is so like my mother. Now, with her I can always feel whether she likes a person or not without her saying a word—I could formerly, I mean, when she was more susceptible to impressions than she is now. It's just the same in my uncle's case; and I knew, in a minute, he didn't like Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge."

"Where is she staying? At the 'Quatre Saisons,' I suppose?"

"No," said George; "she has one of the Schwarzschild houses. You know them, Mrs Routh?"

"Yes, I know them," said Harriet. "I saw the Frau Schwarzschild yesterday, rejoicing in a pink parasol with a coral handle, set with turquoises in clumps."

"That's the woman. Shouldn't wonder if the parasol were a waif from the wardrobe of Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge. She has, then, one of those huge houses for herself and her attendants."

"Did she tell you all this in the ball-room?"

"All *this*? Bless your innocence, she got through such trivialities as these in about two minutes. I might have heard her whole history, and Ireton P.'s, no doubt, particulars of his last illness—if he had a last illness—included, if I had asked her to dance. And, by Jove!" said George, starting up and pushing back the muslin curtain which impeded Harriet's view of the street somewhat, "there she is, coming down the street in a pony-carriage, and looking like a whole triumphal procession on one set of wheels."

Harriet looked out with an assumption of more curiosity than

she felt. In a low, elegant, but rather over-ornamented equipage, drawn by two gray ponies, likewise rather over-ornamented, but very handsome and of great value, sat a lady of beauty as undeniable as that of her horses, and elegance as striking as that of her carriage. Woman-like, Harriet remarked the magnificence of her dress before she noticed the beauty of her face, set off as it was by the aid of the most perfect hat and feather ever put together by the milliner's art. That beauty was at once of the correct and the sparkling order. Her features were of statuesque regularity, but they had all the piquant brilliancy of rich, glowing, passionate life. Cheeks and lips flushed with the full colour of health, masses of hair of the darkest, glossiest brown coiled up in endless braids and rolls under the inimitable hat; eyes so dark that to call them black was a venial exaggeration; teeth which shone like jewels; and in the face, the air, over the whole person and equipment of the woman, from the wrists outstretched over the reins she held, and on which broad bands of jewels flashed, to the tip of the satin boot which protruded beneath the silken carriage-wrap spread daintily over her knees, an intolerable consciousness and domineering boldness which was simply odious. Her ponies were stepping leisurely; her glittering eyes were looking right and left, as though she were searching for some one among the scattered groups she passed, and every member of which stared at her without disguise. As much of her dress as could be seen was a magnificent mixture of satin and lace and jewels; and even in her dress there was a daring, reckless something, indefinable but distinct, which made the gazers feel that in staring at her there was no offence.

"Stunning, isn't she, Mrs Routh? I beg your pardon for the slang, but there is really no other word. Blinding, dazzling, and all the rest of it."

"Stunning, certainly, George," said Harriet, smiling; "but, somehow, I don't think you care particularly to be stunned."

"Not in the least. She is not a bit my style;" and George, thinking of what "his" style was, and how widely it differed from the triumphant figure in the ornate carriage out there, let the

muslin curtain drop, and turned away from the window. Harriet sat down and took up her work.

"A woman whom men would love for a little while, and hate bitterly after, I fancy; but whom women would hate at once, and always."

Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge had not found among the loungers in the town the individual whom her bright black eyes were seeking, when George Dallas and Harriet Routh had marked her from the window. She had driven rapidly away past the gardens and the Schloss, and when fully two miles outside the town she overtook a gentleman sauntering leisurely along, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his moody eyes fixed upon the ground. The carriage was close upon him before he looked round, though the sound made by the wheels and the trotting horses had been distinct in the clear air, as they came along the empty road. Then he turned and greeted the lady with effusion. In a moment he had taken his place beside her, and was whirled away into the green and golden distance of the forest, under the brow-crest of Taunus.

"How very odd that you should know him," said the gorgeous lady of the pony-carriage to the gentleman seated beside her, as she walked her ponies along a shady road, where the slim trees stood on guard on either side, and the fallen leaves rustled under the wheels.

"Not so very odd. He is a near relative of one of my most intimate friends."

"Ah, his nephew, I suppose you mean, a tall young man with good eyes, and a remarkably rich expression of countenance."

"I recognize the description certainly, and it is not flattering. That is the individual; his name is Dallas."

"A booby, I'm convinced. How he can be an intimate friend of yours I cannot understand."

She said this rather sulkily, which, by adding to its character of sincerity, made the indirect flattery in which she was a proficient all the more delicious. Her companion's eyes flashed with

pleasure as he turned them upon her with a look which she did not raise her eyes to receive, but which dyed her cheek a deeper rose-tint than before. Then she went on :

"He is come here with Mr Felton to meet his cousin, I suppose. Arthur Felton will not like that, I fancy. He regarded this fine family reunion as a very decided nuisance, I can assure you."

"I don't quite understand you," her companion said. "Mr Felton's son is not here, that I know of ; he certainly had not arrived yesterday, for Dallas was at my lodgings, and would have been sure to mention it."

"No," replied the lady, with a slow provoking smile, which lighted her eyes up with mischief, and showed more of her faultless teeth than always glistened on the world. "I know he is not here, but he is coming. I gave him a rendezvous here for this very week, in Paris, last March."

The gentleman looked at her in such extreme surprise that it quite amused her. She did not only smile now, she laughed.

"I will explain my meaning," she said, "in very few words. I have known the Feltons all my life, and Arthur has been more or less in love with me since he was a boy ; rather less than more, perhaps, for that's his way, and not at all to the detriment of his being quite as much in love with any number of women besides. He and his father never got on well. Mr Felton did not like 'his ways' as the goodies and gossips say, and, in particular, he did not like his being in love with me, for he can't bear me. Frightfully bad taste, isn't it? Get along, President," this to one of the ponies, as she touched him up with her whip ; "you've had walking enough. Awfully bad taste—thank you, you needn't say yes; you're looking unutterable things. Of course, I don't mind that particularly, and I don't care for Arthur Felton in the very least," with a most enchanting drawl and the faintest pout of the crimson lips. "He made himself a perfect nuisance in Paris, and I really must have quarrelled with him, if I had not gone away with some friends who wouldn't have Arthur—no, not in the very least," and she repeated the before-mentioned little performance quite enchantingly.

"But you agreed to meet him here?" said her companion, very moodily.

"Agreed to meet him here! How ridiculous you are! I gave him rendezvous, which I beg to observe is not precisely the same thing as agreeing to meet him."

"*Sounds* like it," said the gentleman, still more sulkily.

"Very true; but it isn't. I meant to come here—I always lay my plans long beforehand—just at this time, and I thought I might as well let him come here as have him constantly teasing me in the mean time. It was a long while off, remember." And her black eyes danced with mischief and enticement.

"And where is he now?" asked her companion, after he had given her another look which brought the burning colour to her cheeks once more.

"How on earth should I know?" was her answer; and as she made it she turned her head round, and looked him full in the face. "How on earth should I know?" she repeated. "You don't imagine, I suppose, that I correspond with all the friends of my youth. No, no; I never think of people when they are out of my sight. I have no one that I care about enough to think of in absence, and I never write a letter if I can possibly avoid it."

"I understood, when Mr Felton came to London, he had not heard from his son for some time, and he has certainly not seen him there."

"Very likely; Master Arthur is not a particularly dutiful son. However, his father will see him here, if he stays till next week, that's a fact."

"What sort of person is Mr Felton's son? I can't say I admire the old gentleman much."

"No! Don't get on with him? I should think not, neither do I; but Arthur's not in the very least like him. Not nearly so good-looking; not like the Feltons, I should say, at all; like his mother. His cousin, though he's a big booby, is a good-looking fellow, and looks like a gentleman. Now that's just what Arthur does not look like."

"And what is just what he does look like?" asked her com-

panion, who took what he thought was a secret pleasure in hearing this unknown admirer of the beautiful woman who had captivated his fancy spoken of in depreciating terms. But he was quite mistaken. Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge discerned this amiable sentiment with perfect distinctness, and gave it all the nutriment to be supplied by the most consummate and dexterous coquetry.

"H'm!" she said, with a bewitching air of thought and deliberation. "What does Arthur Felton look like? Very like a Yankee, and a little like a Jew;" and she laughed most musically.

As Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge drove her gray ponies towards the little white town, the carriage passed, near a turn in one of the level shady roads, a bench placed between two tall slim trees. Between the bench and the road lay a broad pathway, with a grassy edge. A lady, simply-dressed, of a small slight figure, and whose face was bent downwards, but in whose air there was unmistakable refinement, was sitting on the bench, and leaning a little forward, was making marks on the ground with her parasol, less in idleness than in the abstraction of thought. As the ponies trotted merrily by, and their mistress laughed, rather loudly but musically, the lady looked up, and the eyes of the two women met. The gentleman who sat by the fair American, and who was on the side of the carriage nearest to the pathway, was so absorbed in the animated conversation being carried on between them, that he did not notice the solitary figure, nor see that anything had attracted his companion's attention. Indeed, the attraction was but momentary; the look had hardly been interchanged before the carriage whirled past Harriet Routh.

She came forward upon the footpath, and looked after the fast-receding figure of her husband, as he bent deferentially towards the woman she had seen that morning, until she could see it no longer; and still stood there when the level shaded road was blank and empty.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE BALCONY.

"ARE you going out this evening, Stewart?" asked Harriet Routh of her husband, as they sat together, after their dinner—which had not been a particularly lively meal—was removed. She did not look at him as she put the question, but gazed out of the window, holding back the curtain, while she spoke. Stewart Routh was examining the contents of a heap of letters which lay on the table before him, and did not answer for a moment. She repeated the question :

"Are you going out anywhere this evening, Stewart?"

"Of course I am going out," he answered impatiently. "Why do you ask? I am not going to be mewed up here in this stifling room all the evening."

"No, of course not," she answered very gently and without an inflection in her voice to betray that she perceived the irritation of his tone. "Of course not. You go out every evening, as every one else does here. I only asked because I think of going with you."

"You, Harry?" he said, with real embarrassment, but with feigned cordiality. "That is a sudden start. Why, you have never been out in the evening since we've been here but once, and then you seemed to dislike the place very much. Have you not been out to-day?"

"Yes, I have. I walked a long way to-day. But I have a fancy to go to the Kursaal this evening. George Dallas tells me a number of new people have come, and I have a fancy to see them."

Stewart Routh frowned. He disliked this fancy of his wife's; he did not understand it. Harriet had always shrunk from strangers and crowds, and had gone to Homburg very unwillingly. On their first arrival, when he would have been tolerably willing to take her about with him, though he felt a growing repugnance to her society, she would not go out except to drink the waters

early in the day, and now, on an occasion when it was particularly inconvenient to him, she took a fancy to go out. Besides, he hated the mention of George Dallas's name. There was a tacit sympathy between him and Harriet on this point. True, she bore the pain of his daily visits, but then she was accustomed to bearing pain. But she rarely spoke of him, and she knew his intercourse with Routh was very slight and casual. Harriet possessed even more than the ordinary feminine power of divination in such matters, and she felt instinctively that Mr Felton both disliked and distrusted her husband.

"It is fortunate we do not want to use Dallas for our purpose any longer," Harriet had said to herself on only the second occasion of her seeing the uncle and nephew together—"very fortunate; for Mr Felton would be a decided and a dangerous antagonist. Weak and wavering as George is, his uncle could rule him, I am sure, and would do so, contrary to us." This impression had been confirmed since Harriet had watched, as she was in the habit of doing, the proceedings of Mr Felton and George at Homburg. When George visited her, he rarely mentioned Routh, and she knew they had not dined together ever since they had been there. Assisted, insensibly, by his uncle's opinion and influence, George had emancipated himself, as all his reflections had dictated, but all his resolutions had failed to accomplish. So Harriet ceased to mention George to Routh, and thus it was that her speech jarred unpleasantly upon his ear.

"Indeed," he said. "I should think Dallas a very poor judge of what is or is not likely to amuse you. However, I'm sorry I can't take you out this evening. I have an engagement."

Still she kept her head turned from him and looked out of the window. He glanced at her uneasily, cleared his throat, and went on:

"I promised to meet Hunt and Kirkland at the tables to-night and try our luck. I'm sorry for it, Harry, and I'll keep to-morrow evening quite free. That will do for you, won't it?"

"Yes," she replied; "that will do."

She did not look round, and he did not approach her. He fidgeted about the room a little, sorted his letters, tied them up in

a bundle, locked them into his travelling desk, and finally, with another uneasy glance at her, he left the room. Harriet sat quite still, her hand upon the curtain, her face towards the window. So she sat for several minutes after he had left the house, in evening dress, with a loose paletot on, and she had seen him go down the street towards the Kursaal. Then she wrote a few lines to George Dallas, and, having sent her note, once more seated herself by the window. The room was darkening in the quick coming night, and her figure was indistinct in its motionless attitude by the window, when George came gaily into her presence.

"Here I am, Mrs Routh. What are your commands? Nothing wrong with you, I hope? I can't see you plainly in the dusk. Where's Routh?"

"He has gone out. He had an engagement, and I have a particular fancy to go out this evening, to see the world; in fact, at the Kursaal, in particular. You are always so kind and obliging, I thought, as Stewart could not take me, if your mother did not particularly want you this evening, you might give me your escort for an hour."

"Too delighted," said George, with genuine pleasure. "I am quite free. Mr Carruthers is with my mother, and my uncle is writing letters for the American mail."

Harriet thanked him, and left the room; but returned almost immediately, with her bonnet on, and wearing a heavy black lace veil.

"You will be smothered in that veil, Mrs Routh," said George, as they left the house. "And you won't get the full benefit of this delightful evening air."

"I prefer it," she said; "there are some men here, friends of Stewart, whom I don't care to see."

They went on, almost in silence, for Harriet was very thoughtful, and George was wondering what made her so "low," and whether these friends of Routh's were any of the "old set." He hoped, for Harriet's sake, Routh was not playing recklessly. He was very clever, of course, but still—and with all the wisdom and the zeal of his present mental and moral condition, George shook his head at the idea of a deflection into gambling on the part of Routh.

The often-described scene at the Kursaal displayed all the customary features. Light, gilding, gaiety, the lustre and rustle of women's dress, the murmur of voices and the ring of laughter in all the rooms not devoted to play ; but at the tables, silence, attention, and all the variety which attends the exhibition of the passion of gambling in all its stages. From the careless loungeur, who, merely passing through the rooms, threw a few florins on the table to try what the game was like, to the men and women who lived for and in the hours during which the tables were open to them, all, with the intermediate ranks of votaries and degrees of servitude, were there.

George was so accustomed to Harriet's retiring manners, and so prepared to find the scene distasteful to her, that he did not notice her unwillingness to assume a prominent position in any of the rooms through which they passed. As they entered each, she drew him a little behind the crowd in occupation, and talked to him about the style of the apartment, its decoration, the brilliancy of its light—in short, made any commonplace remarks which occurred to her.

They were standing near the door of one of the saloons, and Harriet, though her veil was not lifted, was scanning from behind its shelter curiously, and with a rapid sharpness peculiar to her, the brilliant-dressed crowd, talking, laughing, flirting, lounging on the velvet seats, and some furtively yawning in the weariness of their hearts ; when a sudden brisk general flutter and a pervading whisper attracted the attention of both. The movement was caused by the entrance of a lady, so magnificently dressed and so extremely handsome that she could not have failed to create a sensation in any resort of gaiety, fashion, and the pomp and pride of life. The voluminous folds of her blue satin dress were covered, overflowed rather, by those of a splendid mantilla of black lace, worn Spanish fashion over her head, where a brilliant scarlet flower nestled between the rich filmy fabric and the lustrous black brown hair coiled closely round it. She came in, her head held up, her bright black eyes flashing, her whole face and figure radiant with reckless beauty and assertion. Two or three gentlemen accompanied her, and her appearance had the same processional air which George

had commented upon in the morning. The lady was Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge.

"We're in luck, Mrs Routh," said George. "Here comes my uncle's fair friend, or fair enemy, whichever she may be, in all her splendour. What a pity Mr Felton is not here! Perhaps she will speak to me."

"Perhaps so," whispered Harriet, as she slipped her hand from under his arm, and sat down on a bench behind him. "Pray don't move, please. I particularly wish to be hidden."

At this moment, Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, advancing with her train, and amid the looks of the assembly, some admiring, some affecting the contemptuous, and a few not remarkably respectful, approached George. From behind him, where her head just touched the back of his elbow, Harriet's blue eyes were fixed upon her. But the triumphant beauty was quite unconscious of their gaze. She stopped for a moment, and spoke to George.

"Good evening, Mr Dallas. Is Mr Felton here? No? He is expecting his son, I suppose."

"He does not know, madam. He has not heard from him."

"Indeed! But Arthur is always lazy about letter-writing. However, he will be here soon, to answer for himself."

"Will he? Do you know, my uncle is very anxious—"

She interrupted him with a laugh and a slight gesture of her hand, in which the woman watching her discerned an insolent meaning, then said, as she passed on:

"He knows where to find me, if he wants to know what I can tell him. Good evening, Mr Dallas."

"Did you hear that, Harriet?" said George, in an agitated voice, after he had watched the brilliant figure as it mingled with the crowd in the long saloon.

"I did," said Harriet. "And though I don't understand her meaning, I think there is something wrong and cruel in it. That is a bold, bad woman, George," she went on, speaking earnestly; "and though I am not exactly the person entitled to warn you against dangerous friends—"

"Yes, yes, you are," interrupted George, eagerly, as he drew her hand again under his arm, and they moved on; "indeed you

are. You are the best of friends to me. When I think of all the past, I hardly know how to thank you enough. All that happened before I went to Amsterdam, and the way you helped me out of my scrapes, and all that happened since; the good advice you gave me! Only think what would have happened to me if I had not acted upon it."

He was going on eagerly, when she stopped him by the iron pressure of her fingers upon his arm.

"Pray don't," she said. "I am not strong now. I can't talk of these—of anything that agitates me."

"I beg your pardon," said George, soothingly. "I ought to have remembered. And also, Mrs Routh, I know you never like to be thanked. What were you going to say when I thoughtlessly interrupted you?"

"I was going to say," she replied, in quite her customary tone, "that I don't think this American lady would be a very safe friend, and that I don't think she feels kindly towards your uncle. There was something malicious in her tone. Is your uncle uneasy about his son?"

The question put George into a difficulty, and Harriet, with unflinching tact, perceived in a moment that it had done so. "I remember," she said, "the tone in which Mr Felton wrote of his son, in his first letter, was not favourable to him; but this is a family matter, George, and you are quite right not to tell me about it."

"Thank you, Mrs Routh," said George. "You are always right, and always kind. I must tell my uncle what has passed this evening. Thus much I may say to you. He has had no news of his son lately, and will be very glad to receive any."

"I don't think he will be glad to receive news of his son through *her*," said Harriet. All the time this conversation lasted she had been scanning the crowd through which they were moving, and noting every fresh arrival.

"Shall we go into the gardens? the lights look pretty," she continued.

George acquiesced, and they passed through the wide doors and down the broad steps into the gay scene over which the tranquil

starlit sky spread a canopy of deep cloudless blue ; the blue of tempered steel ; the dark blue of the night, which is so solemnly beautiful.

"Are you always so successful?" a voice, pitched to a low and expressive key, said to a lady, who sat, an hour later that night, with a heap of gold and silver beside her, under the brilliant light which streamed down over the gaming-tables and their occupants, but lighted up no such dauntless, bright, conquering beauty as hers. The man who had spoken stood behind her ; his hand rested on the back of her chair, and was hidden in the folds of the laced drapery which fell over her dress. She gave him an upward, backward flash of her black eyes, and answered :

"Always, and in everything. I invariably play to win. But sometimes I care little for the game, and tire of it in the winning. Now, for instance, I am tired of this."

"Will you leave it, then?"

"Of course," and she rose as she spoke, took up her money, dropped it with a laugh into a silver-net bag, a revival of the old gypsin, which hung at her waist, and, drawing her lace drapery round her, moved away. The man who had spoken followed her closely and silently. She passed into one of the saloons, and out into a long balcony, on which a row of windows opened, and which overlooked the gardens filled with groups of people.

A band was stationed in one of the rooms which opened upon the terrace, and the music sounded pleasantly in the still air.

"And so you are always successful!" said the man who had spoken before to the lady, who leaned upon the balcony, with light from within just tingeing the satin of her dress, and the faint light of the moon and stars lending her grace and beauty a softened radiance which well became them, though somewhat foreign to them. "I believe that firmly. Indeed, how could you fail? I cannot fancy you associated with defeat. I cannot fancy anything but triumph for such a Venus Victrix as you are!"

"You say very pretty things," was the slightly contemptuous answer, "and you say them very well. But I think I am a little tired of them, among other things. You see, I have heard so

many of them, ever since I can remember. In fact, I have eaten boubons of every kind, of all the colours, as they say in Paris, and they pall upon my taste now."

"You are not easily understood," said her companion; "but you are the most enchanting of enigmas."

"Again!" she said, and held up an ungloved hand, on which jewels shone in the dim mixed light.

"Yes, again and again!" he replied, and he drew nearer to her, and spoke eagerly, earnestly, in low fervent tones. She did not shrink from him; she listened, with her arms wrapped in her lace mantle, resting upon the balcony, the long black eyelashes shading her eyes, and the head, with the scarlet flower decking it, bent—not in timidity, but in attentive thought. The man leaned with his back against the balcony and his face turned partly towards her, partly towards the open windows, through which the light was shining. The lady listened, but rarely uttered a word. It was a story, a narrative of some kind, which her companion was telling, and it evidently interested her.

They were alone. The rooms within filled, and emptied, and filled again, and people rambled about them, went out upon the terrace and into the gardens; but no one intruded upon the *tête-à-tête* upon the balcony.

A momentary pause in the earnest, passionate flow of her companion's speech caused the lady to change her position and look up at him. "What is it?" she said.

"Nothing. Dallas passed by one of the windows just now, and I thought he might have seen me. He evidently did not, for he's just the blundering fool to have come out here to us if he had. It never would occur to him that he could be in any one's way."

There was an exasperation in his tone which surprised the lady. But she said, calmly, "I told you I thought him a booby." She resumed her former position, and as she did so the scarlet flower fell from her hair over the parapet. Her companion did not notice the accident, owing to his position. She leaned a little more forward to see where the flower had fallen. A lady, who had, no doubt, been passing along the terrace under the balcony at the

moment, had picked it up. Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge saw the blossom with the deep red colour in the lady's hand as she walked rapidly away, and was lost to sight at the end of the terrace.

A little more time passed, and the American lady and her companion left the balcony, passed through the central hall, and reached the grand entrance of the Kursaal. A close carriage was in waiting, into which the gentleman handed her.

"Where is the flower you were in your hair to-night?" he said, as he lingered, holding the carriage door in his hand; "have you taken it out? Are you going to give it to me?" Exciting boldness was in his voice, and his keen dark eyes were aflame.

"Impertinent! I lost it; it fell over the balcony while you were talking—talking nonsense, I fancy."

"I will find it when you are gone. I may—No, I will keep it."

"Some one has been too quick for you," she said, with a mischievous laugh. "I saw some one pick it up and walk off with it, very quickly too."

"What? and you—"

"Don't be foolish," she interrupted him; "shut the door, please, I'm cold. I want to pull the glass up—I want to get home. There, good-night. Pooh, are you a booby also? It was only a woman!"

A brilliant light was given by the lamps in the portico, and it shone on her face as she leaned a moment from the carriage window and looked full at him, a marvellous smile on her curved lips and in her black eyes. Then the carriage was gone, and he was standing like a man in a dream.

"Has Mrs Routh come in?" George had asked, anxiously, of the English servant at Routh's lodgings, half an hour before.

"Yes, sir; but she has gone to her room, and she told me to give you this."

It was a note, written hastily in pencil, on a card:

"I felt so ill, after you left me to get me the lemonade, that I was afraid to wait for your return, and came home at once. Pray

forgive me. I know you will come here first, or I would send to your own house.

“H. R.”

“Tell Mrs Routh I hope to see her to-morrow,” said George, “and to find her better.” Then he walked slowly towards his mother’s house, thinking as he went of Clare Carruthers, of the Sycamores, and of how still, and solemn, and stately that noble avenue of beeches in which he saw her first was then doubtless looking in the moonlight; thinking the harmless thoughts of a young man whom love, the purifier, has come to save. A carriage passing him with bright lamps, and a swift vision of sheeny blue seen for an instant, reminded him of Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, and turned his thoughts to the topic of his uncle’s anxiety. When he reached home, he found Mr Felton alone; and told him at once what had passed.

“You are quite correct in supposing that I don’t particularly like this woman, George,” said Mr Felton, after they had talked for some time, “and that I should prefer any other channel of intelligence. But we must take what we can get, and it is a great relief to get any. It is quite evident there’s nothing wrong with him. I don’t allude to his conduct,” said Mr Felton, with a sigh. “I mean as to his safety. I shall call on her to-morrow.”

George bade his uncle good-night, and was going to his own room, when a thought struck him, and he returned.

“It has just occurred to me, uncle,” he said, “that Mrs Bembridge may have a likeness of Arthur. From the account you give of her, I fancy she is likely to possess such trophies. Now we may not require to use such a thing at all, and you have sent for one under any circumstances; still, when you see her, if you consider it expedient, you might ascertain whether she has one in her possession. If her information is not satisfactory, to have a likeness at hand will save time.”

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES.

MR FELTON was scrupulously polite towards women. His American training showed in this particular more strongly than in any other, and caused him to contrast advantageously with the pompous and self-engrossed Mr Carruthers of Poynings, who was not a general favourite in the small society with whom he condescended to mix while in "foreign parts," as he carefully designated the places of his sojourn which were so unfortunate as not to be under British rule. Mr Carruthers was apt to apologize, or rather to explain, the temporary seclusion in which Mrs Carruthers's delicate health obliged him to remain, on the rare occasions when he encountered any of his acquaintances with a highly offensive air of understanding and regretting the loss he was obliged to inflict upon them ; and the innocent and worthy gentleman would have been very much astonished if it had been revealed to him that his condescension had generally the effect of irritating some and amusing others among the number of its recipients. The manners of his brother-in-law were at once more simple and more refined. There was no taint of egotism in them, and, though his engrossing cares, added to a naturally grave disposition, made him serious and reserved, every one liked Mr Felton.

Except Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, who disliked him as much as she could be at the trouble of disliking anybody—which, indeed, was not much, for her real nature was essentially trivial, and her affections, except for herself and her enmities, alike wavering, weak, and contemptible. Mr Felton neither liked nor respected the brilliant woman who was so much admired and so very much "talked about" at Homburg ; but he said nothing of his contumacious dissent from the general opinion except to George, and was gravely courteous and acquiescent when the lady, her dress, her ponies, her "dash," and her wealth—the latter estimated with the usual liberality of society in such cases—were discussed in his presence. They had been pretty freely discussed during a

few days which preceded the conversation concerning her which had taken place between the uncle and nephew. When they met again on the following morning, George asked Mr Felton when he intended to visit Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, and was informed that his uncle purposed writing to the lady to inquire at what time it would be her pleasure and convenience to receive him. George looked a little doubtful on hearing this. The remembrance of Harriet's strongly expressed opinion was in his mind, and he had a notion that his uncle would have done more wisely had he sought her presence unannounced. But such a proceeding would have been entirely inconsistent with Mr Felton's notions of the proper and polite, and his nephew dismissed the subject; reflecting that, after all, as she had said "he knows where to find me if he wants to know what I can tell him," she could not refuse to see him. So Mr Felton's note was written and sent, and an answer returned which perfectly justified George's misgiving that if Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge were afforded an opportunity of offering Mr Felton an impertinence, she would not hesitate to avail herself of it.

The answer was curt and decisive. Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge was particularly engaged that day, and would be particularly engaged the next; on the third she would receive Mr Felton at three o'clock. Mr Felton handed the missive to his nephew with an expression of countenance partly disconcerted and partly amused.

"I thought so," said George, as he tossed the dainty sheet of paper, with its undecipherable monogram and its perfume of the latest fashion, upon the table—"I thought so. We must only wait until Thursday, that is, unless we chance to meet your fair correspondent in our walks between to-day and Thursday."

But Mr Felton and his nephew did not chance to meet Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge either on that or on the succeeding day. Once they saw her pony-carriage coming towards them, but it turned off into another road, and was out of sight before they reached the turn.

"I am pretty sure she saw and recognized us," George Dallas thought; "but why she should avoid my uncle, except out of sheer spite, I cannot imagine."

There was no further to look for the lady's motive. Sheer spite was the highest flight of Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge's powers of revenge or anger. She was an accomplished and systematic coquette; and, having more brains than heart, however mediocre her endowments in either sense, she was perfectly successful. She disliked Mr Felton, because he had never betrayed any admiration or even consciousness of her beauty, and it was very annoying to a woman of her stamp to have tried her arts unsuccessfully on an elderly man. She had tried them merely in an idle hour, and with the amiable purpose of enjoying the novelty of such a conquest; but she had failed, and she was irritated by her failure.

If Mr Felton had even sheltered himself behind the rampart of his years, it would have been more tolerable—if he had extended a kind of paternal protection to her, for instance. But he did not; he simply paid her ordinary attentions in his customary grave way, whenever he was brought in contact with her, and, for the rest, calmly ignored her. When his son appeared in her train, she had not the satisfaction of believing she could make the father wretched by encouraging him. Mr Felton had graver cause than any she could help to procure for him, for disapproval of his son's conduct in most respects. She counted for nothing in the sum of his dissatisfaction, but she certainly became more distasteful to him when she was added to the number of its components. Mark Felton had wounded the sensitive self-love of a woman who knew no deeper passion. She was animated by genuine spite towards him, when she declined to accede to his request for an immediate interview.

By what feeling was Stewart Routh, who was with her when she received Mr Felton's note, and who strongly urged the answer she sent to it, actuated? He would have found it difficult to tell. Not jealousy; the tone in which she had spoken of Arthur Felton precluded that feeling. Routh had felt that it was genuine, even while he knew that this woman was deliberately enslaving him, and therefore was naturally suspicious of every tone in which she spoke of any one. But his judgment was not yet entirely clouded by passion; he had felt, in their brief conversation relative to Arthur Felton, that her tone had been true. He hated George

Dallas now ; he did not deceive himself about that. There was a vague dread and trouble in his thoughts concerning the young man. Once he had only despised him. He no longer despised him ; but he hated him instead. And this hatred, further reaching than love, included all who were connected with George, and especially Mr Felton, whose grave and distant manner, whose calm and penetrating glance, conveyed keen offence to Stewart Routh. They had not spoken of the matter to each other ; but Routh had felt, as soon and as strongly as Harriet, that his influence over Dallas was at an end. As it happened, he had successfully used that influence for the last time in which he could foresee any need for its employment, and therefore Mr Felton had not done him any practical injury ; but that did not matter : he hated him all the same.

He had watched the smile with which Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge read Mr Felton's note a little anxiously. He did not dare to ask her from whom the missive came, but she graciously gave him the information.

"He wants to see me, to find out Master Arthur's doings," she said, with a ringing mischievous laugh. "Not that I know anything about him since he left Paris, and I shall have to look serious and listen to more preaching than goes well with the sunshine of to-day. It's rather a nuisance ;" and the lady pouted her scarlet lips very effectively.

"Don't see him," said Routh, as he leant forward and gazed at her with eager admiration. "Don't see him. Don't lose this beautiful day, or any part of it, for him. You can't give him any real information."

"Except that his son is coming here," she said, slyly.

"I forgot," said Stewart Routh, as he rose and walked moodily to the window.

Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge smiled a little triumphantly, and said, gaily : "He shall wait for the news. I dare say it will be quite as welcome to-morrow."

"Don't say to-morrow either," said Routh, approaching her again, as she seated herself at her writing-table, and bending so as to look into her eyes.

"Why?" she asked, as she selected a pen.

"Because I must go away on Thursday. I have an appointment, to meet a man at Frankfort. I shall be away all day. Let this anxious parent come to you in my absence; don't waste the time upon him."

"And if the time does not seem so wonderfully precious to me, what then?" said the lady, looking straight at him, and giving to her voice a truly irresistible charm, a tone in which the least possible rebuke of his presumption was mingled with the subtlest encouragement. "What then?" she repeated. ("Decidedly, he is dreadfully in earnest," she thought.)

"Then," said Routh, in a low hoarse voice, "then I do not say you are deceiving me, but I am deceiving myself."

So Mr Felton received the answer to his note, and found that he must wait until the following Thursday.

People talked about Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge at Homburg as they had talked about her at New York and at Paris, at Florence and at Naples; in fact, in every place where she had shone and sparkled, distributed her flashing glances, and dispensed her apparently inexhaustible dollars. They talked of her at all the places of public resort, and in all the private circles. Mr Felton was eagerly questioned about his beautiful compatriot by the people whom he met at the springs and in the gardens, and even by the visitors to Mr and Mrs Carruthers. Probably he did not know much about her; certainly he said little. She was a widow, without near relations, childless, and possessed of a large fortune. There was no doubt at all about that. Was she "received" in her own country? Yes, certainly. He had never heard anything against her. Her manners were very independent, rather too independent for European ideas. Very likely Mr Felton was not a judge. At all events, ladies rarely visited the brilliant American. Indeed! But that did not surprise him. Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge did not care for ladies' society—disliked it, in fact—and had no hesitation about saying so. Women did not amuse her, and she cared only for being amused. This, with the numerous amplifications which would naturally attend such a discussion, had all been heard by George, and was just the sort of thing cal-

culated to excite the curiosity and interest of a young man of his disposition and antecedents. But it all failed to attract him now. Life had become very serious and real to George Dallas of late, and the image he carried about with him, enshrined in his memory, and sanctified in his heart, had nothing in common with the prosperous and insolent beauty which was the American's panoply.

It was rather late in the afternoon of the day on which Mr Felton had received Mrs Bembridge's note, before George presented himself at Harriet's lodgings. He had been detained by his mother, who had kept him talking to her a much longer time than usual. Mrs Carruthers was daily gaining strength, and her pleasure in her son's society was touching to witness, especially when her husband was also present. She would lie on her sofa, while the two conversed, more and more freely, as the air of making one another's acquaintance which had attended their first few days together wore off, and was replaced by pleasant companionship. At such times George would look at his mother with his heart full of remorse and repentance, and think mournfully how he had caused her all the suffering which had indirectly led to the result for which she had not dared to hope. And when her son left her, quiet tears of gratitude fell from his mother's eyes—those eyes no longer bright indeed, but always beautiful. There was still a dimness over her mind and memory: she was easily interested in and occupied with things and subjects which were present; and her son was by no means anxious for her entire awakening as to the past. Let the explanation come when it might, it must be painful, and its postponement was desirable. There were times, when they were alone, when George saw a troubled, anxious, questioning look in his mother's face, a look which betokened a painful effort of the memory—a groping look, he described it to himself—and then he would make some excuse to leave her, or to procure the presence of a third person. When they were no longer alone, the look gradually subsided, and placid calm took its place.

That calm had been uninterrupted during their long interview on the morning in question. For the first time, George talked to

his mother of his literary plans and projects, of the fair measure of success which had already attended his efforts, of his uncle's generosity to him—in short, of every pleasing subject to which he could direct her attention. The time slipped by unnoticed, and it was with some self-reproach that George found he had deferred his visit to Harriet to so late an hour.

This self-reproach was not lessened when he reached Harriet's lodgings. He found her in her accustomed seat by the window, but totally unoccupied, and his first glance at her face filled him with alarm.

"You are surely very ill, Mrs Routh," he said. "There is something wrong with you. What is it?"

Harriet looked at him with a strange absent look, as if she hardly understood him. He took her hand, and held it for a moment, looking at her inquiringly. But she withdrew it, and said :

"No, there is nothing wrong with me. I was tired last night, that is all."

"I am afraid you thought me very stupid, Mrs Routh ; and so I was indeed, to have kept you waiting so long, and not brought you the lemonade you wished for, after all. I was so frightened when I returned to the place where I had left you, and you were not there. The fact was, I got the lemonade readily enough ; but I had forgotten my purse, and had no money to pay for it, so I had to go and find Kirkland in the reading-room, and got some from him."

"Was he alone?"

"Kirkland? O yes, alone, and bored as usual, abusing everybody and everything, and wondering what could possibly induce people to come to such a beastly hole. I hate his style of talk, and I could not help saying it was odd he should be one of the misguided multitude."

"Did you see Mr Hunt?"

"Yes ; he was just leaving when I met him, not in the sweetest of tempers. The way he growled about Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge (her mere name irritates him) amused me exceedingly."

"Indeed. How has she provoked his wrath?"

"I could not wait to hear exactly, but he said something about some man whom he particularly wanted as a 'pal' here—delightful way of talking, his! beats Kirkland's—having fallen into her clutches. I suppose he is left lamenting; but I fancy Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge is the safer companion of the two, unless the individual in question is uncommonly sharp."

Harriet looked attentively and searchingly at George. His unconsciousness was evidently quite unfeigned, and she refrained from asking him a question that had been on her lips.

"I came back to look for you as soon as ever I could get rid of Hunt," continued George; "but you had disappeared, and then I came here at once. Routh had not come in, I think, then?"

"No," said Harriet, curtly.

Then the conversation drifted to other matters, and George, who felt unusually happy and hopeful that day, was proportionately self-engrossed, and tested Harriet's power of listening considerably. She sat before him pale and quiet, and there was never a sparkle in her blue eyes, or a flush upon her white cheek; yet she was not cold, not uninterested, and if the answers she made, and the interest she manifested, were unreal, and the result of effort, at least she concealed their falsehood well. He talked of his mother and of his uncle, and told her how Mr Felton had made him a present of a handsome sum of money only that morning.

"And, as if to prove the truth of the saying that 'it never rains but it pours,'" said George, "I not only got this money from him, which a little time ago would have seemed positive riches to me, and a longer time ago would have saved me from—well, Mrs Routh, I need not tell *you* from what it would have saved me; but I got a handsome price for my story, and a proposal from the *Piccadilly* people to do another serial for them, to commence in November."

"Do you really think, George," Harriet said, as if her attention had not extended to the concluding sentence—"do you really think that money would have kept you all right?"

George reddened, and looked disconcerted; then laughed uneasily, and answered:

"I know what you mean. You mean that I know myself very little if I lay the blame of my sins and follies on circumstances, don't you?"

She did not answer him, nor did she remove her serious fixed gaze from his face.

"Yes," he said, "that is what you mean, and you are right. Still, I think the want of money made me reckless, made me worse than I should otherwise have been. I might not have spent it badly, you know, after all. I don't feel any inclination to go wrong now."

"No; you are under your mother's influence," said Harriet. And then George thought how much he should like to tell this woman—for whom he felt so much regard, and such growing compassion, though he could not give any satisfactory reason for the feeling—about Clare Carruthers. He thought he should like to confess to her the fault of which he had been guilty towards the unconscious girl, and to ask her counsel. He thought he should like to acknowledge the existence of another influence, in addition to his mother's. But he restrained the resolution, he hardly knew why. Harriet might think him a presumptuous fool to assign any importance to his chance meeting with the young lady, and, besides, Harriet herself was ill, and ill at ease, and he had talked sufficiently about himself already. No, if he were ever to mention Clare to Harriet, it should not be now.

"Routh is too rich now, too completely a man of capital and business, for me to hope to be of any use to him with my little windfalls," said George, heartily; "but of course he knows, and you too, I shall never forget all I owe him."

Harriet forced herself to smile, and utter some commonplace sentences of deprecation.

"There is one thing I want to do with some of the money I have been paid for my story," said George, "and I want to consult you about it. I have to touch on a painful subject, too, in doing so. You remember all about the bracelet which my dear mother gave me? You remember how we broke it up together that night?"

Harriet remembered. She did not tell him so in words, but she bent her head, and turned it from him, and set her face towards the street.

"You remember," he repeated. "Pray forgive me, if the allusion is agitating. We little thought then what had happened; however, we won't talk about *that* any more. What I want to do is this: you have the gold setting of the bracelet and the blue stones, sapphires, turquoises: what do you call them? I want to replace the diamonds. I can do so by adding a little of my uncle's gift to my own money, and, when you return to England, I shall get the gold and things from you. I can easily procure the Palais Royal bracelet—Ellen will get it for me—and have the other restored exactly. If my mother is ever well enough to be told about it—and there is every probability that she will be, thank God—I think she will be glad I should have done this."

"No doubt," said Harriet, in a low voice. She did not start when he spoke of the strange task they had executed in concert on that memorable night, and no outward sign told how her flesh crept. "No doubt. But you will not have the bracelet made in England?"

"No," said George; "I shall have it made in Paris. I will arrange about it when my uncle and I are passing through."

"When does Mr Felton go to England?"

"As soon as he gets his letters from New York, if his son does not turn up in the mean time. I hope he may do so. When do you think of returning?"

"I don't know," said Harriet, moodily. "If it depended on me, to-morrow. I hate this place."

Energy was common to Harriet's mode of speech, but vehemence was not; and the vehemence with which she spoke these words caused George to look at her with surprise. A dark frown was on her face—a frown which she relaxed with a visible effort when she perceived that he was looking at her.

"By the by," she said, rising and going to a table in a corner of the room, "you need not wait for my return to have the bracelet made. My desk always travels with me. The little packet is in it. I have never looked at or disturbed it. You had better

take it to Paris with you, and give your directions with it in your hand. There will be no occasion, I should think, to let the jeweller see the other."

She opened the desk as she spoke, and took from a secret drawer a small packet, folded in a sheet of letter-paper, and sealed. George Dallas's name was written upon it. It was that which she had put away in his presence so many months before (or years, was it, or centuries?). He took it from her, put it into his pocket, unopened, and took leave of her.

"You won't venture out this evening, Mrs Routh, I suppose?" said George, turning again to her when he had reached the door.

"No," said Harriet. "I shall remain at home this evening." When he left her, she closed and locked her desk, and resumed her place at the window. The general dinner-hour was drawing near, and gay groups were passing, on their way to the hotels and to the Kurseal. The English servant, after a time, told Harriet that the dinner she had ordered from a restaurant had been sent in; should it be served, or would she wait longer for Mr Routh?

Dinner might be served, Harriet answered. Still she did not leave the window. Presently an open carriage, drawn by gray ponies, whirled by. Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge was unaccompanied, except by her groom. The carriage went towards the Schwarzschild House. She was going to dine at home, probably. The servant asked if she should close the blinds. No, Harriet preferred them left as they were; and when she had made a pretence of dining, she once more took her place by the window. Lights were brought, but she carried them to the table in the corner of the room, where her desk stood, and sat in the shadow, looking out upon the street. Soon the street became empty, rain fell in torrents, and the lights glimmered on the surface of the pools. The hours passed. Harriet sat motionless, except that once or twice she pressed her hands upon her temples. Once she murmured, half audibly:

"I wonder if I am going mad?"

At eleven o'clock Routh came home. He opened the door of the room in which Harriet was sitting, came in, and leaned against the wall without speaking. In quick instinctive alarm she went

to the table in the corner, took up a candle, and held it towards his face. He was quite pale, his eyes were glassy, his hair was disordered. In a moment Harriet saw, and saw for the first time in her life, that he was intoxicated.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RECOGNITION.

WITH the unexpected return of George Dallas to London from Amsterdam, an occurrence against which so much precaution had been taken, and which had appeared to be so very improbable, a sense of discouragement and alarm had stolen over Stewart Routh. In the coarse bold sense of the term, he was a self-reliant man. He had no faith in anything higher or holier than luck and pluck ; but, in those mundane gods, his faith was steadfast, and had been hitherto justified. On the whole, for an outcast (as he had been for some time, that time, too, so important in a man's life) he had not done badly ; he had schemed successfully, and cunning and crime had availed him. He was a callous man by nature, of a base disposition ; and, under any circumstances, would have been cool-headed and dogged. In the circumstances in which he found himself, his dogged cool-headedness was peculiarly useful and valuable. He had relied upon them without any doubt or misgiving until the day on which he was convinced by George Dallas's appearance on the stage, which he believed him to have abandoned for an indefinite time, that he had made a miscalculation. Then a slow cold fear began to creep over him. Had his luck—what marvellous luck it had been!—turned ? Believers in such a creed as his are mostly superstitious fanatics. He had felt some such dread ; then, from the moment when Harriet—Harriet, who should have seen that he had blundered : confound the woman, was *she* losing her head ?—had told him, in her smooth encouraging way, that this new difficulty should be surmounted as

the others had been. Not the smallest touch of repentance, not the slightest shadow of remorse, fell upon him with the stirring of this fact—only a hard, contemptuous anger against himself and Harriet, and a bitter scornful hatred for the young man who had been his tool for so long, and might now, in a moment, be turned into the agent of his punishment. When George Dallas left Harriet after the discussion which had terminated in his promise not to move in the matter of the identification of Deane, Stewart Routh, though he bore himself with calmness in his talk with his wife, had invariably writhed and raged under the galling sense of the first check he had received. If he could have done it safely, if the deed would not have been more fatal than the conjuncture he feared, he would have murdered Dallas readily; and he told himself so. He had none of the poetry, none of the drama of crime about him. He was not a man to kill one human being because it suited his purpose to do so, and then to hesitate about killing another, if a still more powerful preventive presented itself; he was incapable of the mixture of base and cruel motives with the kind of sentimental heroics, with which the popular imagination endows criminals of the educated classes. He had all the cynicism of such individuals, cynicism which is their strongest characteristic; but he had nothing even mock heroic in his composition. His hatred of George was mixed with the bitterest contempt. When he found the young man amenable beyond his expectations; when he found him unshaken in the convictions with which Harriet had contrived to inspire him and hardly requiring to be supported by his own arguments, his reassurance was inferior to his scorn.

"The fool, the wretched, contemptible idiot!" Routh said, as he looked round his dressing-room that night, and noted one by one the signs which would have betokened to a practised eye preparations for an abrupt departure, "it is hardly worth while to deceive him, and to rule such a creature. He was full of suspicion of me before he went away, and the first fruits of that pretty and affecting conversation of his, under the influence of his mother and the territorial decencies of Poynings, was what he flattered himself was a resolution to pay me off, and be free of me. He

yields to my letter without the slightest difficulty, and comes here the moment he returns. He believes in Harriet as implicitly as ever; and if he is not as fond of me as he was, he is quite as obedient." The cynical nature of the man showed itself in the impatient weariness with which he thought of his success, and in the levity with which he dismissed, or at least tried to dismiss, the subject from his mind. There was, however, one insuperable obstacle to his getting rid of it—his wife.

Harriet had miscalculated her strength; not the strength of her intellect, but that of her nerves, and the strain had told upon them. She still loved her husband with a desperate kind of love; but all its peace, all its strength, all its frankness—and even in the evil life they had always led it had possessed these qualities—had vanished. She loved him now with all the old intensity of passion, but with an element of fierceness added to it, with a horrid craving and fear, sometimes with a sudden repulsion, which she rebelled against as physical cowardice, causing her to shrink from him in the darkness, and to shut her ears from the sound of his breathing in his sleep. And then she would upbraid herself fiercely, and ask herself if she, who had given him all her life and being, who had renounced for him—though she denied to herself that such renunciation was any sacrifice, for did she not love him, as happy women, the caressed of society, do not know how to love—home, name, kindred, and God, could possibly shrink from him now? She had not played any pretty little game of self-deception; she had not persuaded herself that he was other than he really was; she did not care, she loved *him*, just as he was, no better and no worse. She lived for him, she believed in, she desired, she asked no other life; and if a terrible anguish had come into that life latterly, that was her share of it, her fair share. It was not easy, for she was a woman and weak; her nerves would thrill sometimes, and phantoms swarm about her; sleeplessness would wear her down, and a spell be set upon her lips, under which they strove vainly to curve with their old smile, and to utter their old words of endearment and protestation; for she scorned and hated herself for such weakness, and could have torn her rebellious flesh with rage, that sometimes it would creep and

turn cold when he touched her, or even when he only spoke. She fought this false and dastardly weakness, as she called it, with steady bravery, and with the resolve to conquer, which is always half a moral battle ; but she did not conquer it, she only quelled it for a little while. It returned on occasions, and then it tortured and appalled her even more than when the foe had been always in position.

All such conflicts of feeling had the effect of narrowing the sphere of her life, of concentrating her whole attention on, and intensifying her absorption in, her husband. A lassitude which her own good sense told her was dangerous began to take possession of her. They were better off now—she did not rightly know how, or how much, for she had gradually lapsed from her previous customary active overseeing of Routh's affairs, and had been content to take money as he gave it, and expend it as he desired, skilfully and economically, but with an entire indifference, very different from the cheerful, sunny household thriftiness which had formerly been so marked a feature in their Bohemian life, and had testified, perhaps more strongly than any other of its characteristics, to the utter deadness of the woman's conscience. His comforts were as scrupulously looked after as ever, and far more liberally provided for ; but the tasteful care for her home, the indescribable something which had invested their life with the charm of a refinement contrasting strangely with its real degradation, had vanished. Harriet's manner was changed—changed to a quietude unnatural to her, and peculiarly unpleasant to Routh, who had had a scientific appreciation of the charm of steady, business-like, calm judgment and decision brought to bear on business matters ; but discarded, at a moment's notice, for sparkling liveliness and a power of enjoyment which never passed the bounds of refinement in its demonstrativeness. "Eat, drink, and be merry" had been their rule of life in time that seemed strangely old to them both ; and if the woman alone had sometimes remarked that the precept had a corollary, she did not care much about it. "To-morrow ye die" was an assurance which carried little terror to one absolutely without belief in a future life, and who, in this, had realized her sole desire, and lived

every hour in the fulness of its realization. Stewart Routh had never had the capacity, either of heart or of intellect, to comprehend his wife thoroughly; but he had loved her as much as he was capable of loving any one, in his own way, and the strength and duration of the feeling had been much increased by their perfect comradeship. His best aid in business, his shrewd, wise counsellor in difficulty, his good comrade in pleasure, his sole confidant—it must be remembered that there was no craving for respect on the one side, no possibility of rendering it, no power of missing it, on the other—and the most cherished wife of the most respectable and worthy member of society might have compared her position with that of Harriet with considerable disadvantage on many points.

Things were, however, changed of late, and Harriet had begun to feel, with something of the awfully helpless, feeble foreboding with which the victims of conscious madness foresee the approach of the foe, that there was some power, whose origin she did not know, whose nature she could not discern, undermining her, and conquering her unawares. Was it bodily illness? She had always had unbroken health, and was slow to detect any approach of disease. She did not think it could be that, and conscience, remorse, the presence, the truth, of the supernatural components of human life, she disbelieved in; therefore she refused to take the possibility of their existence and their influence into consideration. She was no longer young, and she had suffered—yes, she had certainly suffered a very great deal; no one could love as she loved and not suffer, that was all. Time would do everything for her; things were going well; all risk was at an end, with the procuring of George's promise and the quieting of George's scruples (how feeble a nature his was, she thought, but without the acrid scorn a similar reflection had aroused in her husband's mind); and every week of time gained without the revival of any inquisition, was a century of presumptive safety. Yes, now she was very weak, and certainly not quite well; it was all owing to her sleeplessness. How could any one be well who did not get oblivion in the darkness? This would pass, and time would bring rest and peace. Wholly possessed by her love for her husband, she was not con-

scious of the change in her manner towards him. She did not know that the strange repulsion she sometimes felt, and which she told herself was merely physical nervousness, had so told upon her, that she was absent and distant with him for the most part, and in the occasional spasmodic bursts of love which she yielded to showed such haunting and harrowing grief as sometimes nearly maddened him with anger, with disgust, with *ennui*—not with repentance, not with compassion—maddened him, not for her sake, but for his own.

The transition, effected by the aid of his intense selfishness, from his former state of feeling towards Harriet, to one which required only the intervention of any active cause to become hatred, was not a difficult matter to a man like Routh. Having lost all her former charm, and much of her previous usefulness, she soon became to him a disagreeable reminder. Something more than that—the mental superiority of the woman, which had never before incommoded him, now became positively hateful to him. It carried with it, now that it was no longer his mainstay, a power which was humiliating, because it was fear-inspiring. Routh was afraid of his wife, and knew that he was afraid of her, when he had ceased to love her, after he had begun to dislike her ; so much afraid of her that he kept up appearances to an extent, and for a duration of time, inexpressibly irksome to a man so callous, so egotistical, so entirely devoid of any sentiment or capacity of gratitude.

Such was the position of affairs when George Dallas and Mr Felton left London to join Mr and Mrs Carruthers at Homburg. From the time of his arrival, and even when he had yielded to the clever arguments which had been adduced to urge him to silence, there was a sense of insecurity, foreboding in Routh's mind ; not a trace of the sentimental superstitious terror with which imaginary criminals are invested after the fact, but with the reasonable fear of a shrewd man, in a tremendously dangerous and difficult position, who knows he has made a false move, and looks, with moody perplexity, for the consequences sooner or later.

"He must have come to England, at all events, Stewart," Harriet said to her husband, when he cursed his own imprudence for

the twentieth time ; " he must have come home to see his uncle. Mr Felton would have been directed here to us by the old woman at Poynings, and we must have given his address. Remember, his uncle arrived in England the same day he did."

" I should have sent him to George, not brought George to him," said Routh. " And there's that uncle of his, Felton ; he is no friend of ours, Harriet ; he does not like us."

" I am quite aware of that," she answered ; " civil as he is, he is very honest, and has never pretended to be our friend. If he is George's friend, and George has told him anything about his life since he has known us, I think we could hardly expect him to like us."

Her husband gave her one of his darkest looks, but she did not remark it. Many things passed now without attracting her notice ; even her husband's looks, and sometimes his words, which were occasionally as bitter as he dared to make them.

He was possessed with a notion that he must, for a time at least, keep a watch upon George Dallas ; not near, indeed, nor apparently close, but constant, and as complete as the maintenance of Harriet's influence with him made possible. For himself, he felt his own influence was gone, and he was far too wise to attempt to catch at it, as it vanished, or to ignore its absence. He acquiesced in the tacit estrangement ; he was never in the way, but he never lost sight of George ; he always knew what he was doing, and had early information of his movements, and with tolerable accuracy, considering that the spy whose services he employed was quite an amateur and novice.

This spy was Mr James Swain, who took to the duties of his new line of business with vigorous zeal, and who seemed to derive a grim kind of amusement from their discharge. Stewart Routh had arrived with certainty at the conclusion that the young man had adhered to the promised silence up to the time of his leaving England with his uncle, and he felt assured that Mr Felton was in entire ignorance of the circumstances which had had such terrible results for Mrs Carruthers. It was really important to him to have George Dallas watched, and, in setting Jim Swain to watch him, he was inspired by darkly sinister motives, in view of

certain remote contingencies—motives which had suggested themselves to him shortly after George's unhesitating recognition of the boy who had taken Routh's note to Deane, on the last day of the unhappy man's life, had solved the difficulty which had long puzzled him. Only second in importance to his keeping George Dallas in view was his not losing sight of the boy; and all this time it never occurred to Routh, as among the remote possibilities of things, that Mr Jim Swain was quite as determined to keep an eye on him.

Harriet had acquiesced in her husband's proposal that they should go to Homburg readily. It happened that she was rather more cheerful than usual on the day he made it, more like, though still terribly unlike, her former self. She was in one of those intervals in which the tortured prisoner stoops at the stake, during a temporary suspension of the inventive industry of his executioner. The fire smouldered for a little, the pincers cooled. She was in the hands of inflexible tormentors, and who could tell what device of pain might attend the rousing from the brief torpor? Nature must have its periods of rest for the mind, be the agony ever so great; and hers was of the slow and hopeless kind which has such intervals most surely, and with least efficacy. One of them had come just then, and she was placid, drowsy, and acquiescent. She went with Routh to Homburg; he managed to make some hopeful, promising, and credulous acquaintances on the way, and was besides accredited to some "business people," of perfectly authentic character, at Frankfort, in the interest of the flourishing Flinders.

The change, the novelty, the sight of gaiety in which she took no share, but which she looked on at with a partial diversion of her mind, did her good. It was something even to be out of England; not a very rational or well-founded relief, but still a relief, explicable and defensible too, on the theory to which she adhered, that all her ills were merely physical. The torpid interval prolonged itself, and the vital powers of the sufferer were recruited for the wakening.

This took place when Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge's pony-carriage

passed her as she sat by the side of the broad shaded road, and the woman's splendid black eyes met hers. When her husband passed her without seeing her, absorbed in passionate admiration, which any child must have recognized as such, for the beautiful woman whose pony-carriage was like a triumphal chariot, so royal and conquering of aspect was she.

Keen were the tormentors, and full of avidity, and subtle was the new device to tax the recruited strength and mock the brief repose. It was raging, fierce, fiery, maddening jealousy.

It was late in the afternoon of the day on which Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge had sent her answer to Mr Felton's note, and while George Dallas was sitting with Mrs Routh, that the beautiful widow and her companion—this time exploring the forest glades in another direction, in which they met but few of the visitors to the springs—once more mentioned Mr Felton and his son. The gray ponies were going slowly, and the French groom in attendance was considering the probable direction of the "affair" in which his mistress had so precipitately engaged herself, and which, being conducted in the English tongue, was interpreted to him by glances and tones only. The beauty of the face on which Stewart Routh was gazing in an intensity of admiration, with a certain desperation in it, in which a cleverer woman than this one would have seen indications of character to warn and alarm her, but which this one merely recognized as a tribute due to her, was marvellously bright and soft, as the slanting rays of the sun came through the tree stems, and touched it lingeringly, lovingly. Her black eyes had wonderful gleams and reflections in them, and the masses of her dark hair were daintily tinged and tipped with russet tints. She was looking a little thoughtful, a little dreamy. Was she tired, for the moment, of sparkling? Was she resting herself in an array of the semblance of tenderness, more enchanting still?

"You knew him, then, in your husband's lifetime? He is not a new acquaintance?"

"What a catechist you are!" she said, with just a momentary glance at him, and the least flicker of a smile. "I did know him

in my husband's lifetime, who highly disapproved of him, if you care for *that* piece of information ; we were great friends and he was rather inclined to presume upon the fact afterwards."

She lingered upon the word, and gave it all the confirmatory expression Routh had expected and feared.

"And yet you make an appointment with him to meet him *here*, in this place, where every one is remarked and speculated upon ; here, alone, where you are without even a companion —" He paused, and with a light, mocking laugh, inexpressibly provoking, she said :

"Why don't you say a 'sheep-dog' ! We know the immortal Becky quite as well as you do. In the first place, my appointment with Arthur Felton means simply nothing. I am just as likely to break it as to keep it ; to go to London, or Vienna, or Timbuctoo, to-morrow, if the fancy takes me ; or to stay here, and have him told I'm not at home when he calls, only that would please his father ; and Mr Felton is about the only male creature of my acquaintance whom I don't want to please. In the second place, I don't care one straw who remarks me, or what they remark, and have no notion of allowing public opinion to take precedence of my pleasure."

She laughed again, a saucy laugh which he did not like, gave him another glance and another flicker of her eyelash, and said :

"Why, how extremely preposterous you are ! You know well, if I cared what people could, would, might, or should say, I would not allow you to visit me every day, and I would not drive you out alone like this."

The perfect unconcern and freedom of the remark took Routh by surprise, and disconcerted him as completely as its undeniable truth. He kept silence ; and Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, amused at the blank expression of his countenance, burst into a hearty fit of laughter this time.

"I tell you I don't care about public opinion. All the men admire me, no matter what I do ; and all the women hate me, and would hate me all the same, for my beauty—which I entirely appreciate, you know—if I made my life as dull and decorous, as miserable, squalid, and canting, as I make it pleasant, and joyous,

and 'not the thing.' Neither men nor women dare to insult me ; and if they did, I should know how to meet the emergency, I assure you, though I am not at all clever. I am only courageous — 'plucky,' your English ladies call it, I think, in the last new style of stable and barrack-room talk. I am that ; I don't think that I could be afraid of anything or any one."

"Not of a man who really loved you with all the force and passion of his heart?" said Routh, in a hoarse whisper, and bending a fierce dark look upon her.

"Certainly not," she replied, lightly ; but the colour rose in her cheek, and her breath came a little quicker. "I don't believe in people loving with passion and force, and all that sort of thing. It is pretty to talk about on balconies, and it looks well on paper, in a scrawly hand, running crookedly up into the corner, and with plenty of dashes, and no date—" And here she laughed again, and touched up the grays. Routh still kept silence, and still his dark look was bent upon her.

"No, no," she went on, as the rapid trot of the ponies began again to sound pleasantly on the level road, and she turned them out of the forest boundaries towards the town, "I know nothing about all that, except *pour rire*, as they say in Paris, about everything under the sun, I do believe. To return to Arthur Felton ; he is the last person in the world with whom I could imagine any woman could get up anything more serious than the flimsiest flirtation."

"You did 'get up' that, however, I imagine?" said Routh.

"Of course we did. We spouted very trite poetry, and he sent me bouquets—very cheap ones they were, too, and generally came late in the evening, when they may, being warranted not to keep, be had at literally a dead bargain ; and we even exchanged photographs—I don't say portraits, you will observe. His is like enough ; but that is really nothing, even among the most prudish of the blonde misses. I wonder the haberdashers don't send their likenesses with their bills, and I shall certainly give mine to the postman here ; I am always grateful to the postman everywhere, and I like this one—he has nice eyes, his name is Hermann, and he does not smoke."

"What a degenerate German!" said Routh. "And so Mr Arthur Felton has your likeness?"

"Had—had, you mean. How can I tell where it is now?—thrown in the fire, probably, and that of the reigning sovereign of his affections comfortably installed in the locket which contained it, which is handsome, I confess: but he does not so much mind spending money on himself, you see. It is exactly like this."

She placed her whip across the reins, and held all with the left hand, whilst she fumbled with the right among the satin and lace in which she was wrapped, and drew out a short gold chain, to which a richly-chased golden ball, as large as an egg, was attached. Turning slightly towards him, and gently checking her ponies, she touched a spring, and the golden egg opened lengthways, and disclosed two small finely-executed photographs.

One was a likeness of herself, and Routh made the usual remarks about the insufficiency of the photographic art in certain cases. He was bending closely over her hand, when she reversed the revolving plate, and showed him the portrait on the other side.

"That is Arthur Felton," she said.

Then she closed the locket, and let it drop down by her side amid the satin and the lace.

The French groom had in his charge a soft India shawl in readiness for his mistress, in case of need. This shawl Stewart Routh took from the servant, and wrapped very carefully round Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge as they neared the town.

"The evening has turned very cold," he said; and, indeed, though she did not seem to feel it, and rather laughed at his solicitude, Routh shivered more than once before she set him down, near the Kursaal, and then drove homewards, past the house where his wife was watching for her, and waiting for him.

Routh ordered his dinner at the Kursaal, but, though he sat for a long time at the table, he ate nothing which was served to him. But he drank a great deal of wine, and he went home to Harriet—drunk.

"How horribly provoking! It must have come undone while I was handling it to-day," said Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge to her

maid, when that domestic was attiring her for dinner. "I had the locket, open, not an hour ago."

"Yes, ma'am," answered the maid, examining the short gold chain; "it is not broken, the swivel is open."

"And of all my lockets, I liked my golden egg best," lamented Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FIRST APPEAL.

"STEWART," said Harriet Routh to her husband in a tone of calm, self-possessed inquiry, on the following day, "what has happened? What occurred yesterday, which you had not the courage to face, and deprived yourself of the power of telling me?"

As Harriet asked him this question, she unconsciously assumed her former manner. Something told her that the cause of Routh's conduct, and of the distress of mind which she read in his face, was not connected with the subject that was torturing her. Anything apart from that, any misfortune, any calamity even, might draw them together again; might teach him anew his need of her, her worth to him—she felt some alarm, but it was strangely mingled with satisfaction. The sharp agony she had endured had impaired her faculties so far, had dulled her clear understanding so far, that the proportions of the dangers in her path had changed places, and the first and greatest danger was this stranger—this beautiful, dreadful woman. In that direction was the terrible impotence, the helpless horror of weakness, which is the worst attribute of human suffering; in every other, there was the power to exercise her faculties, to rally her presence of mind, to call on her fertility of resource, to act for and with him. With him at her side, and in his cause, Harriet was consciously strong; but from a trouble in which he should be arrayed against her, in

which he should be her enemy, she shrank, like a leaf from the shrivelling touch of fire.

She was standing by his side as she asked him the question, in the familiar attitude which she had discarded of late. Her composed figure and pale calm face, the small firm white hand, which touched his shoulder with the steady touch he knew so well, the piercing clear blue eyes, all had the old promise in them, of help that had never failed, of counsel that had never misled. He thought of all these things, he felt all these things, but he no longer thought of, or remembered, or looked for the love which had been their motive and their life. He sat moodily, his face pale and frowning, one clenched hand upon his knee, the other restlessly drumming upon the table; his eyes were turned away from her, and for some time after she had spoken he kept a sullen silence.

"Tell me, Stewart," she repeated, in a softer voice, while the hand that touched his shoulder moved gently to his neck and clasped it. "I know there is something wrong, very wrong. Tell me what it is."

He turned and looked full at her.

"Do you remember what you said, Harriet, when that letter came from Poynings—what you said about the hydra and its heads?"

"I remember," she answered. Her pale cheek grew paler; but she drew nearer to his side, and her fingers clasped his neck more closely and more tenderly. "I remember. Another head has sprung up, and is menacing you."

"Yes," he said, half fiercely, half wearily. "This cursed thing is never to be escaped nor forgotten, I believe. I can hardly tell you what has happened, Harry, and even you will hardly see your way out of this."

A touch of feeling for her was in his voice. He really did suffer in the anticipation of the shock she would have to sustain.

"Tell me—tell me," she repeated, faintly, and with a quick involuntary closing of her eyes, which would have told a close observer of constant suffering and apprehension.

"Sit down, Harry." He rose as he spoke, placed her in his chair, and stood before her, holding both her hands in his.

"I have found out that the man we knew as Philip Deane was—was Arthur Felton, George Dallas's cousin, the man they are inquiring about, whom they are expecting here."

She did not utter a cry, a groan, or any sort of sound. She shrank into the chair she was sitting in, as if she cowered for life in a hiding-place, her outstretched hands turned cold and clammy in her husband's grasp. Into her widely opened blue eyes a look of unspeakable horror came, and the paleness of her cheeks turned to ashen gray. Stewart Routh, still standing before her holding her hands, looked at her as the ghastly change came over her face, telling—what words could never tell—of the anguish she was suffering, and thought for a moment that she was dying before his face. The breath came from her lips in heavy gasps, and her low white brow was damp with cold sluggish drops.

"Harriet," said Routh—"Harriet, don't give way like this. It's awful—it's worse than anything I ever thought of, or feared. But don't give way like this."

"I am not giving way," she said. Drawing her hands from his hold, she raised them to her head, and held them pressed to her temples while she spoke. "I will not give way. Trust me, as you have done before. This, then, is what I have felt coming nearer and nearer, like a danger in the dark—this—this dreadful truth. It is better known than vague. Tell me how you have discovered it."

He began to walk up and down the room, and she still sat cowering in her chair, her hands pressing her temples, her eyes, with their horror-stricken looks, following him.

"I discovered it by an extraordinary accident. I have not seen much of Dallas, as you know, and I know nothing in particular about Mr Felton and his son. But there is a lady here—an American widow—who knows Felton well."

"Yes," said Harriet, with distinctness; and now she sat upright in her chair, and her low white brow was knitted over her horror-stricken eyes. "Yes, I have seen her."

"Have you indeed? Ah! well, then, you know who I mean. She and he were great friends—lovers, I fancy," Routh went on, with painful effort; "and when they parted in Paris, it was with

an understanding that they were to meet here just about this time. She met George Dallas, and told him, not that, but something which made him understand that information was to be had from her, and she has appointed an interview with Mr Felton for to-morrow."

"Yes," repeated Harriet, "I understand. When she and he meet, she will tell him his son is coming here. His son will not come. How did you discover what you have discovered?"

He took out of his pocket a large locket like a golden egg, and opened it by touching a spring. It opened lengthwise, and held it towards Harriet. She looked at one of the photographs which it enclosed, and then, pushing it from her, covered her face with her hands.

"She showed me that yesterday," Routh continued, his throat drier, his voice more hesitating with every word he spoke, "when she told me she was expecting him—and I contrived to secure it."

"For what purpose?" asked Harriet, hoarsely.

"Don't you see, Harriet," he said, earnestly, "that it is quite plain Dallas has never seen a likeness of his cousin, or he must have recognized the face? Evidently Mr Felton has not one with him. Dallas might not have seen this; but then, on the other hand, he might; and to prevent his seeing it, even for a few hours, until we had time to talk it over, to gain ever so little time, was a great object."

"You took a strange way of gaining time, Stewart," said Harriet. "Had you come home last night in a state to tell me the truth, time would really have been gained. We might have got away this morning."

"Got away!" said Routh. "What do you mean? What good could that do?"

"Can you seriously ask me?" she returned. "Does any other course suggest itself to you?"

"I don't know, Harry. I am bewildered. The shock was so great that the only thing I could think of was to try and forget it for a little. I don't know that I ever in my life deliberately drank for the purpose of confusing my thoughts, or postponing

them, before ; but I could not help it, Harry. The discovery was so far from any apprehension or fancy I had ever had."

"The time was, Stewart," said Harriet, slowly and with meaning, "when, instead of 'confusing' or 'postponing' any trouble, dread, or difficulty, you would have brought any or all of them to me at once ; unhappily for us both, I think that time is past."

He glanced at her sharply and uneasily, and an angry flush passed over his face.

"What cursed folly have you got in your head? Is it not enough that this fresh danger has come down upon me—"

"Upon *us*, you mean," she interrupted, calmly.

"Well, upon *us*, then—but you must get up an injured air, and go on with I don't know what folly? Have done with it ; this is no time for womanish nonsense—"

"There is so much womanish nonsense about me ! There is such reasonableness in your reproach !"

Again he looked angrily at her, as he walked up and down the room with a quicker step. He was uneasy, amazed at the turn she had taken, at the straying of her attention from the tremendous fact he had revealed ; but, above and beyond all this, he was afraid of her.

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and said, "Let it drop, let it drop ; let me be as unreasonable as you like, and blame me as much as you please, but be truer to yourself, Harriet, to your own helpful nature, than to yield to such fancies now. This is no time for them. We must look things in the face, and act."

"It is not I, but you, who refuse to look things in the face, Stewart. This woman, whom I do not know, who has not sought my acquaintance, whose name you have not once mentioned before me, but who makes you the confidant of her flirtations and her appointments—she is young and beautiful, is she not?"

"What the devil does it matter whether she is or not?" said Routh, fiercely. "I think you are bent on driving me mad. What has come to you? I don't know you in this new character. I tell you, this woman—"

"Mrs Bembridge," said Harriet, calmly.

"Mrs Bembridge, then, has been the means of my making a

discovery which is of tremendous importance, and thus she has unconsciously saved me from an awful danger.

"By preventing George Dallas from finding out this fact for a little longer?"

"Precisely so. Now I hope you have come to yourself, Harriet, and will talk rationally about this."

"I will," she said, rising from her chair and approaching him. She placed her hands upon his shoulders, and looked at him with a steady, searching look. "We will talk this out, Stewart, and I will not shrink from anything there is to be said about it; but you must hear me then, in my turn. We are not like other people, Stewart, and our life is not like theirs. Only ruin can come of any discord or disunion between us."

Then she quietly turned away and sat down by the window, with her head a little averted from him, waiting for him to speak. Her voice had been low and thrilling as she said those few words, without a tone of anger in it, and yet the callous man to whom they were addressed heard in them something which sounded like the warning or the menace of doom.

"When Dallas knows what we now know, Harriet," said Routh, "he will come to us and tell us his discovery, and then the position of affairs will be that for which we were prepared, if we had not succeeded in inducing him to be silent about Deane's identity."

"Exactly so," said Harriet; "with the additional difficulty of his having concealed his knowledge."

"Yes," said Routh; "but that is *his* affair, not ours. He concealed his knowledge because he was compromised. There is nothing to compromise me. I neglected a public duty, certainly, in favour of a private friendship; but that is a venial offence."

It was wonderful to see how the callousness of the man asserted itself. As he arranged the circumstances, and stated them, he began to regain his accustomed ease of manner.

"It is unfortunate that he should be compromised in this double way, and, of course, there will be a great deal to go through, which will be hard to bear, and not easy to manage; but, after all, the

thing is only as bad as it was when Dallas came back. Don't you see that, Harriet?"

"I see that, Stewart, but I also see that he will now have a tenfold interest in finding out the truth. Hitherto he might have been content with clearing himself of suspicion, but now he will be the one person most deeply interested in discovering the truth."

"But how can he discover it?" said Routh: his face darkened, and he dropped his voice still lower. "Harriet, have you forgotten that if there be danger from him, there is also the means of turning that danger on himself? Have you forgotten that I can direct suspicion against him tenfold stronger than any that can arise against me?"

She shivered, and closed her eyes again. "No, I have not forgotten," she said; "but oh, Stewart, it is an awful thing to contemplate—a horrible expedient."

"Yet you arranged it with a good deal of composure, and said very little about its being horrible at the time," said Routh, coarsely. "I hope you are not going to be afflicted with misplaced and ill-timed scruples now. It's rather late in the day, you know, and you'll have to choose, in that case, between Dallas and me."

She made him no answer.

"The thing is just this," he continued: "Dallas cannot come to any serious grief, I am convinced; but, if the occasion arises, he must be let come to whatever grief there may be—a trial and an acquittal at the worst. The tailor's death, and his mother's recovery, will tell in his favour, though I've no doubt he will supply all the information Evans would have given, of his own accord. I think there is no real risk; but, Harriet, much, very much, depends on you."

"On me, Stewart! How?"

"In this way. When Dallas comes to see you, you must find out whether any other clue to the truth exists; if not, there is time before us. You must keep up the best relations with him, and find out all he is doing. Is it not very odd that he has not mentioned his uncle's solicitude about his son to you?"

"I don't think so, Stewart. I feel instinctively that Mr Felton dislikes and distrusts us (what well-founded dislike and distrust it

was!" she thought, mournfully, with a faint pity for the unconscious father)—"and George knows it, I am sure, and will not talk to me about his uncle's affairs. He is right there; there is delicacy of feeling in George Dallas."

"You seem to understand every turn in his disposition," said Routh, with a sneer.

"There are not many to understand," replied Harriet, simply. "The good and the evil in him are easily found, being superficial. However, we are not talking of his character, but of certain irreparable harm which we must do him, it seems, in addition to that which we have done. Go on with what you were saying."

"I was saying that you must find out what you can, and win his confidence in every way. I shall keep as clear of him as possible, under any circumstances. If the interview of to-morrow goes off without any discovery, there will be a chance of its not being made at all."

"Impossible, Stewart—quite impossible," said Harriet, earnestly. "Do not nourish any such expectation. How long, do you suppose, will Mr Felton remain content with expecting his son's arrival, and hearing no news of him? How soon will he set inquiries on foot which must end in discovery? Remember, hiding is possible only when there is no one seeking urged by a strong motive to find. Listen to me, now, in your turn, and listen to me as you used to do, not to cavil at my words, or sneer at them, but to weigh them well. This is a warning to us, Stewart. I don't talk superstition, as you know. I don't believe any nonsense of the kind; but this I do believe, because experience teaches it, that there are combinations of circumstances in which the wise may read signs and tokens which do not mislead. Here is just such a case. The first misfortune was George's return; it was confirmed by his uncle's arrival; it is capped by this terrible discovery. Stewart, let us be warned and wise in time; let us return to England at once—to-morrow. I suppose you will have the means of learning the tenor of Mr Felton's interview with this lady who knew his son so well. If no discovery be then made, let us take it as another indication of luck, circumstance, what you will, and go."

"What for?" said Routh, in amazement. "Are you returning to that notion, when all I have said is to show you that you must not lose sight of Dallas?"

"I know," she said—"I know; but you are altogether wrong. George Dallas must make the discovery some time, and must bear the brunt of the suspicion. I don't speak in his interests, but in yours—in mine. Let it come when it may, but let us be away out of it all. We have money now, Stewart—at least, we are not so poor but that we may make our way in another country—that we may begin another life. Have I ever talked idly, Stewart, or given you evil counsel? No, surely not. In all the years for which you have been all the world to me, I have never spoken vainly; let me not speak vainly now. I might implore, I might entreat," she went on, her eyes now bright with eagerness and her hands clasped. "I might plead a woman's weakness and natural terror; I might tell you I am not able for the task you dictate to me; but I tell you none of these things. I am able to do and to suffer anything, everything, that may or must be done, or suffered for you. I don't even speak of what I *have* suffered; but I say to you, be guided by me in this—yield to me in this. There is a weak spot in our stronghold; there is a flaw in our armour. I know it. I cannot tell, I cannot guess where it is. An instinct tells me that ruin is threatening us, and this is our way of escape. Oh, my husband, listen to me!"

He was standing opposite to her, leaning against an angle of the wall, mingled fury and amazement in his face, but he did not interrupt her by a word or a sign.

"There is no power in me," she went on, "to tell you the strength of my conviction that this is the turning-point in our fate. Let us take the money we have, and go. Why should you stay in England, Stewart, more than in any other country? We have no ties but one another." She looked at him more sharply here, through all her earnestness. "Friendships and the obligations they bring are not for us. The world has no home bonds for us. Where money is to be made you can live, in such content as you can ever have; and where you are I am as content as I can ever be."

"You are a cheerful counsellor," Routh broke out, in uncontrollable passion. "Do you think I am mad, woman, when I have played so desperate a game, and am winning it so fast, that I should throw up my cards now? Let me hear no more of this. Come to your senses, if you can, and as soon as you can, for I will not stand this sort of thing, I can tell you. I will not leave this place an hour sooner than I intended to leave it. And as to leaving England, if the worst came to pass that could happen, I should hardly be driven to that extremity. What devil is in you, Harriet, to prompt you to exasperate me, when I looked to you for help?"

"What devil is in *you*," she answered him, rising as she spoke; "that is prompting you to your ruin? What devil, do I say? Words, mere words. What do I know or believe of God, or devil, or any ruling power but the wicked will of men and women, to waylay, and torture, and destroy? The devil of blindness is in you, the devil of wilfulness, the devil of falsehood and ingratitude; and a blacker devil still, I tell you. See that it does not rend you, as I read in the old book—for ever closed for me."

Her breast was heaving violently, and her eyes were unnaturally bright, but there was not a ray of colour in her face, and her voice was rapid and unfaltering in its utterance. Routh looked at her, and hated her. Hated her, and feared her, and uttered never a word.

"The madness that goes before destruction is coming fast upon you," she said; "I see it none the more clearly because that destruction must involve me too. Let it come; I am ready for it, as I have been ready for any evil for a long time now. You speak idle words to me when you reproach me, Stewart. I am above and beyond reproach from you. I am as wicked a woman, if the definition of good and evil be true, as ever lived upon this earth; but I have been, and am, to you what no good woman could be—and look to it, if you requite me ill. I don't threaten you in saying this—no threats can come from me, nor would any avail—but in your treachery to me, its own punishment will be hidden, ready to spring out upon and destroy you. Scorn my in-

fluence, slight my counsel, turn a deaf ear to the words that are inspired by love such as only a wretch like me, with no hope or faith at all in Heaven, and only this hope and faith on Earth, can feel—and see the end.”

He stepped forward and was going to speak, but she put out her hand and stopped him.

“Not now. Don’t say anything to me, don’t ask me anything now. Don’t speak words that I must be doomed for ever to remember—for ever to long to forget. Have so much mercy on me, for the sake of the past and for the sake of the present. Ruin is impending over us; if you will, you may escape it; but there is only one way.”

She had drawn near the door as she spoke the last words. In another instant she had left him.

Left him in a most unenviable state of bewilderment, rage, and confusion. The emotion which had overpowered him when he had made the discovery of yesterday was almost forgotten in the astonishment with which Harriet’s words had filled him. An uneasy sense, which was not anything so wholesome as shame, was over him. What did she know of his late proceedings? Had she watched him? Had any of the gossiping tongues of the place carried the tidings of the beautiful American’s openly paraded conquest? No, that could hardly be, for Harriet knew no one at Homburg but George, and George knew nothing about him. Was he not always with either his mother, or his uncle, or with Harriet herself? Besides, George would not say anything to Harriet that could hurt her. The fellow was a fool and soft-hearted, his quondam friend thought, with much satisfaction. He must set it right with Harriet, however; under any circumstances he must not quarrel with her; in this fresh complication particularly. It could only be a general notion that she had taken, and he must endeavour to remove it; for though he was horribly weary of her, though he hated her at that moment, and felt that he should very likely continue to hate her, even at that moment, and while resolved to disregard her advice, and utterly unmoved by her appeal, he knew he could not afford to lose her aid.

If the beautiful American could have seen the visions of pro-

babilities or possibilities in which she was concerned, that floated through Stewart Routh's mind as he stood gazing out of the window when his wife had left him, she might, perhaps, have felt rather uneasy at the revelation. Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge was not an adept at reading character, and sometimes, when a disagreeable impression that her new admirer was a man of stronger will and tougher material than she altogether liked to deal with, crossed her mind, she would dismiss it with the reflection that such earnestness was very flattering and very exciting for a time, and the duration of that time was entirely within her choice and discretion.

Stewart Routh stood at the window thinking hurriedly and confusedly of these things. There was a strange fear over him, with all his assurance, with all the security which he affirmed over and over again to himself, and backed up with a resolution which he had determined from the first to conceal from Harriet.

"If my own safety positively demands it," he thought, "Jim's evidence about the note will be useful, and the payment to the landlady will be tolerably conclusive. Dallas told Harriet the initials were A. F. I wonder it never occurred to me at the time."

Presently he heard Harriet's step in the corridor. It paused for a moment at the sitting-room, then passed on, and she went out. She was closely veiled, and did not turn her head towards the window as she went by. Routh drew nearer and watched her, as she walked swiftly away. Then he caught sight of George Dallas approaching the house. He and Harriet met and shook hands, then George turned and walked beside her. They were soon out of sight.

"I don't think I shall see much more of Homburg," George was saying. "My mother has taken an extraordinary longing to get back to Poynings. Dr Merle says she must not be opposed in anything not really injurious. She is very anxious I should go with her, and Mr Carruthers is very kind about it."

"You will go, George, of course?"

"I don't quite know what to do, Mrs Routh. I don't like to let my mother go without me, now that things are so well squared; I don't like to persuade her to put off her journey, and yet I feel

I ought, if possible, to remain with my uncle until his truant son turns up."

"Has—has nothing been heard of him yet?"

"Not a word. I was awfully frightened about it, though I hid it from my uncle, until I met Mrs Ireton P. &c. But though she didn't say much, I could see by her manner it was all right. Bless you, *she* knows all about him, Mrs Routh. I dare say he'll appear next week, and be very little obliged to us all for providing a family party for him here."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DURING THE LULL.

ON the appointed day, at the appointed hour, Mr Felton, accompanied by his nephew, called on Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, who received the two gentlemen with no remarkable cordiality. Coquetry was so inseparable from her nature and habits, that she could not forbear from practising a few of her fascinations upon the younger man, and she therefore relaxed considerably from the first formality of her demeanour after a while. But George Dallas was the least promising and encouraging of subjects for the peculiar practice of the beautiful widow, and he so resolutely aided his uncle in placing the conversation on a strictly business footing, and keeping it there, as to speedily convince the lady that he was entirely unworthy of her notice. She was not destitute of a certain good nature which rarely fails to accompany beauty, wealth, and freedom, and she settled the matter with herself by reflecting that the young man was probably in love with some pretty girl, to whom he wrote his verses, and considered it proper to be indifferent to the attractions of all female charmers beside. She did not resent his inaccessibility; she merely thought of it as an odd coincidence that Mr Felton's nephew should be as little disposed to succumb to love as Mr Felton himself, and felt inclined to term-

inate the interview as soon as possible. Consequently, she made her replies to Mr Felton's questions shorter and colder as they succeeded one another, so that he felt some difficulty in putting that particular query on which George had laid restricted stress. He did not perceive how deep and serious his nephew's misgivings had become, and George grasped at every excuse that presented itself for deferring the awakening of fears which, once aroused, must become poignant and terrible. He had learnt from Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge some of the facts which she had communicated to Routh: young Felton's intention of visiting Homburg at about the period of the year which they had then reached; his departure from Paris, and the unbroken silence since maintained towards her as towards Mr Felton himself. The information she had to give was in itself so satisfactory, so tranquillizing, that Mr Felton, who had no reason to expect obedience from his son, felt all his fears—very dim and vague in comparison with those which had assailed George's mind—assuaged. It was only when his nephew had given him some very expressive looks, and he had seen the fine dark eyes of Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge directed unequivocally towards the allegorical timepiece which constituted one of the chief glories of the Schwarzschild mansion, that he said:

"My nephew has never seen his cousin, Mrs Bembridge, and I have no likeness of him with me. I know you are a collector of photographs; perhaps you have one of Arthur?"

"I had one, Mr Felton," replied Mrs Bembridge, graciously, "and would have shown it to Mr Dallas with pleasure yesterday, but, unfortunately, I have lost it in some unaccountable way."

"Indeed," said Mr Felton; "that is very unfortunate. Was it not in your book, then?"

"I wore it in a locket," said the lady, with a very slight accession to the rich colour in her cheek—"a valuable gold locket, too. I am going to have it cried."

"Allow me to have that done for you," said Mr Felton. "If you will describe the locket, and can say where you were yesterday, and at what time, I will take the necessary steps at once; these may not succeed, you know; we can but try."

So Mrs Bembridge described the lost trinket accurately, and

the visit came to a conclusion. As the two gentlemen were leaving the house, they met Mr Carruthers, who accosted Mr Felton with stately kindness, and, entering at once into conversation with him, prevented the interchange of any comment upon the interview which had just taken place between the uncle and nephew. George left the elder gentlemen together, and turned his steps towards Harriet's lodgings. In a few minutes he met her and joined her in her walk, as Routh had seen from the window.

He stood there, long after George and Harriet had passed out of sight, thinking, with sullen desperate rage, of all she had said. He felt like an animal in a trap. All his care and cunning, all his caution and success, had come to this. It was strange, perhaps—if the probability or the strangeness of anything in such a condition of mind as his can be defined—that he seldom thought of the dead man. No curiosity about him had troubled the triumph of Routh's schemes. He had met so many men in the course of his life who were mere waifs and strays in the world of pleasure and swindling; who had no ties and no history; about whom nobody cared; for whom, on their disappearance from the haunts in which their presence had been familiar, nobody inquired; that one more such instance, however emphasized by his own sinister connection with him, made little impression on Stewart Routh. Looking back now in the light of this revelation, he could not discover that any intimation had ever been afforded to, or had ever been overlooked by him. The dead man had never dropped a hint by which his identity might have been discovered, nor had he, on the other hand, ever betrayed the slightest wish or purpose of concealment, which probably would have aroused Routh's curiosity, and set his investigative faculties to work. He had never speculated, even at times when all his callousness and cynicism did not avail to make him entirely oblivious of the past, on the possibility of his learning anything of the history of Philip Deane; he had been content to accept it, as well as its termination, as among the number of the wonderful mysteries of this wonderful life, and had, so far as in him lay, dismissed the matter from his mind. Nothing that had ever happened in his life before had given him such a shock as the discovery he had made yesterday.

The first effect on him has been seen ; the second, ensuing on his conversation with his wife, was a blind and desperate rage, of a sort to which he had rarely yielded, and of whose danger he was dimly conscious even at its height. He was like a man walking on a rope at a giddy elevation, to whom the first faint symptoms of vertigo were making themselves felt, who was invaded by the death-bringing temptation to look down and around him. The solemn and emphatic warning of his wife had had its effect upon his intellect, though he had hardened his heart against it. It was wholly impossible that her invariable judgment, perception, and reasonableness—the qualities to which he had owed so much in all their former life—could become immediately valueless to a man of Routh's keenness ; he had not yet been turned into a fool by his sudden passion for the beautiful American ; he still retained sufficient sense to wonder and scoff at himself for having been made its victim so readily ; and he raged and rebelled against the conviction that Harriet was right, but raged and rebelled in vain.

In the whirl of his thoughts there was fierce torture, which he strove unavailingly to subdue : the impossibility of evading the discovery which must soon be made ; the additional crime by which alone he could hope to escape suspicion ; a sudden unborn fear that Harriet would fail him in this need—a fear which simply signified despair—a horrid, baffled, furious helplessness ; and a tormenting, overmastering passion for a woman who treated him with all the calculated cruelty of coquetry—these were the conflicting elements which strove in the man's dark, bad heart, and rent it between them, as he stood idly by the window where his wife had been accustomed to sit and undergo her own form of torture.

By degrees one fear got the mastery over the others, and Routh faced it boldly. It was the fear of Harriet. Suppose the worst came to the worst, he thought, and there was no other way of escape, would she suffer him to sacrifice George ? *He* could do it ; the desperate resource which he had never hinted to her was within his reach. They had talked over all possibilities in the beginning, and had agreed upon a plan and direction of flight in certain contingencies, but he had always entertained the idea of denouncing George, and now, by the aid of Jim Swain, he saw his way to

doing so easily and successfully. Harriet had always been a difficulty, and now the obstacle assumed portentous proportions. He had no longer his old power over her. He knew that ; she made him feel this in many ways ; and now he had aroused her jealousy. He felt instinctively that such an awakening was full of terrible danger ; of blind, undiscoverable peril. He did not indeed know by experience what Harriet's jealousy might be, but he knew what her love was, and the ungrateful villain trembled in his inmost soul as he remembered its strength, its fearlessness, its devotion, its passion, and its unscrupulousness, and thought of the possibility of all these being arrayed against him. Not one touch of pity for her, not one thought of the agony of such love betrayed and slighted, of her utter loneliness, of her complete abandonment of all her life to him, intruded upon the tumult of his angry mind. He could have cursed the love which had so served him, now that it threatened opposition to his schemes of passion and of crime. He did curse it, and her, deeply, bitterly, as one shade after another of fierce evil expression crossed his face.

There was truth in what she had said, apart from the maudlin sentiment from which not even the strongest-minded woman, he supposed, could wholly free herself—there was truth, a stern, hard truth. He could indeed escape now, taking with him just enough money to enable them to live in decent comfort, or to make a fresh start in a distant land, where only the hard and honest industries thrive and came to good. How he loathed the thought ! How his soul sickened at the tame, miserable prospect ! He would have loathed it always, even when Harriet and he were friends and lovers ; and now, when he feared her, when he was tired of her, when he hated her, to contemplate such a life *now*, was worse—well, not worse than death, that is always the worst of all things to a bad man, but something too bad to be thought of. There was truth in what she had said, and the knowledge of what was in his own thoughts, the knowledge she did not share, made it all the more true. Supposing he determined to denounce George, and supposing Harriet refused to aid him, what then ? Then he must only set her at defiance. If such a wild impossibility as her betraying him could become real, it

would be useless. She was his wife ; she could not bear witness against him ; in that lay his strength and security, even should the very worst, the most inconceivably unlikely of human events, come to pass. And he would set her at defiance ! He kept up no reticence with himself now. Within a few days a change had come upon him, which would have been terrible even to him, had he studied it. He hated her. He hated her, not only because he had fallen madly in love with another woman and was day by day becoming more enslaved by this new passion ; not chiefly even because of this, but because she was a living link between him and the past. That this should have happened now ! That she should have right and reason, common sense, and all the force of probability on her side, in urging him to fly, now—now when he was prospering, when the success of a new speculation in which he had just engaged would, with almost absolute certainty, bring him fortune,—this exasperated him almost to the point of frenzy.

Then there arose before his tossed and tormented mind the vision of a blissful possibility. This other beautiful, fascinating woman, who had conquered him by a glance of her imperial eyes, who had beckoned him to her feet by a wave of her imperial hand—could he not make her love him well enough to sacrifice herself for him also ? Might he not escape from the toils which were closing around him into a new, a glorious liberty, into a life of wealth, and pleasure, and love ? She had yielded so immediately to the first influence he had tried to exert over her ; she had admitted him so readily to an intimacy to whose impropriety, according to the strict rules of society, she had unhesitatingly avowed herself aware and indifferent ; she had evinced such undisguised pleasure in his society, and had accepted his unscrupulous homage so unscrupulously, that he had as much reason as a coarse-minded man need have desired for building up a fabric of the most presumptuous hope.

As these thoughts swept over him, Routh turned from the window, and began again to stride up and down the room. His dark face cleared up, the hot blood spread itself over his sallow cheek, and his deep-set eyes sparkled with a sinister light. The desperate expedient to which he had resorted on the previous day

had gained him time, and time was everything in the game he designed to play. The discovery would not be made for some time by George Dallas. When it should be made, his triumph might be secured, he might be beyond the reach of harm from such a cause, safe in an elysium, with no haunting danger to disturb. The others concerned might be left to their fate—left to get out of any difficulty that might arise, as best they could. The time was short, but that would but inspire him with more courage and confidence; the daring of desperation was a mood which suited Stewart Routh well.

Hours told in such cases. The fire and earnestness with which he had spoken to the beautiful widow had evidently surprised and, he thought, touched her. If the demonstration had not been made in his own favour, but in that of another, no one would have more readily understood than Stewart Routh how much beauty of form and feature counts for in the interpretation of emotion, how little real meaning there may be in the beam of a dark bright eye, how little genuine emotion in the flush of a rose-tinted cheek. But it was his own case, and precisely because it was, Stewart Routh interpreted every sign which his captor had made according to his wishes rather than by the light of his experience. Indeed, he had little experience of a kind to avail him in the present instance; his experience had been of stronger, even more dangerous, types of womanhood than that which Mrs Bembridge represented, or of the infinitely meaner and lower. As he mused and brooded over the vision which had flashed upon him, not merely as a possibility to be entertained, as a hope to be cherished, but as something certain and definite to be done, his spirits, his courage, his audacity rose, and the dark cloud of dread and foreboding fell from him. He had so long known himself for a villain, that there was not even a momentary recoil in his mind from the exceeding baseness of the proceeding which he contemplated.

"I can count upon a fortnight," he said to himself while completing a careful toilet, "and by that time I shall either be away from all this with her, or I shall be obliged to put George Dallas in jeopardy. If I fail with *her*—but I won't think of failure; I cannot fail." He left a message with Harriet, to the effect that

he should not dine at home that day (but without any explanation of his further movements), and went out.

"I do not see the force of your reasons for objecting to my introducing you to my mother," said George Dallas to Harriet. Mrs Carruthers had passed them in an open carriage during their walk, and George had urged Harriet to make his mother's acquaintance.

"Don't you?" she replied, with a smile in which weariness and sadness mingled. "I think you would, if you thought over them a little. They include the necessity for avoiding anything like an unpleasant or distressing impression on her mind, and you know, George," she said, anticipating and silencing deprecation by a gesture, "if she remembers your mention of me at all, she can remember it only to be distressed by it; and the almost equally important consideration of not incurring your step-father's anger in any way."

"As for that, I assure you he is everything that is kind to me now," said George.

"I am happy to hear it; but do not, therefore, fall into an error which would come very easy to your sanguine and facile temperament. Be sure he is not changed in his nature, however modified he may be in his manners. Be quite sure he would object to your former associates just as strongly as ever; and remember, he would be right in doing so. Will you take my advice once more, George? You have done it before—" she stopped, and something like a shudder passed over her; "let by-gones be completely by-gones. Never try to associate the life and the home that will be yours for the future with anything in the past—least, oh least of all, with us."

"What do you mean, Mrs Routh?" George asked her eagerly. "Do you mean that you want to give me up? I know Routh does—he has not spoken to me a dozen times of his own accord since he has been here—but you, do *you* want to get rid of me?"

She paused for a moment before she answered him. Should she say Yes, and be done with it? Should she let things drift on to the inevitable end, yielding to the lassitude of mind and

body which was stealing over her? Should she gain another argument to use in a renewed appeal to her husband for the flight in which she saw the sole prospect of safety, by providing herself with the power of telling him a rupture had taken place between herself and Dallas, and her power of guiding him was gone? The temptation was strong, but caution, habitual to her, instinctive in her, restrained her. Not yet, she thought; this may be my next move. George repeated his question:

"Do you mean that *you* want to get rid of me?"

"No," she answered, "I do not, George. I was only led into overstating what I do want, that you should conform to your step-father's reasonable wishes. He has been generous to you, be you just towards him."

"I will," said George warmly. "I wonder how far he will carry his newly-found good will. I wonder—" he paused; the name of Clare Carruthers was on his lips; in another moment he would have spoken of her to Harriet. He would have told her of the self-reproach, mingled, however, with hope, which daily grew and throve in the congenial soil of his sanguine nature; he would have pierced Harriet's heart with a new sorrow, a fresh remorse, by telling her of another life, young, innocent, and beautiful, involved in the storm about to burst, whose threatenings were already sounding in the air. But it was not to be—the name of Clare Carruthers was never to be spoken by George to Harriet. Apparently she had not heard his last words: her attention had strayed; she was very weary.

"I must go home," she said abruptly. "We are close to your mother's house. You had better go to her now; she has returned from her drive."

"Let me see you home," said George; "pray don't dismiss me in this way."

"No, no," she said, hurriedly; "let me have my own way, please. You will come to me to-morrow, and let me know your plans."

She stood still, and put out her hand so decidedly in the attitude of farewell, that he had no choice but to take leave of her. They parted on the shaded road, close to the garden gate of Mr

Carruthers's house. As Harriet walked away with her usual rapid step, George looked after her very sadly.

"She is fearfully changed," he said; "I never saw anything like it. Since I went to Amsterdam she might have lived twenty years and been less altered. Can it be that my uncle is right, that Routh ill-treats her? I wonder if there's any truth in what those fellows said last night about him and Mrs Ireton P.? If there is, it's an infernal shame—an infernal shame." And George Dallas opened the little gate in the wall, and walked up the garden with a moody countenance, on which, however, a smile showed itself as he lifted his hat gaily to his mother, who nodded to him from the window above. His spirits rose unaccountably. The positive information which Mrs Bembridge had afforded Mr Felton relative to his son's expected arrival had immensely relieved George's mind. He was satisfied with the progress of his novel; day by day his mother's health was improving. His prospects were bright. The distressing recollection of Deane, and the unhappy consequences of the tragedy, were becoming light and easy to him; sometimes he forgot all about it. If he could but win his step-father's confidence and regard sufficiently to induce him to pardon his clandestine acquaintance with Clare, he would be altogether happy. How serene and beautiful the weather was! He stood in the verandah, which extended into the garden, bare-headed, and inhaled the sweet air with keen pleasure. His impressionable nature readily threw off care and caught at enjoyment.

"It's such a glorious afternoon, mother," he said, as he entered Mrs Carruthers's sitting-room; "I'm sure you must have enjoyed your drive."

"I did, very much," his mother replied. "The air seems rather closer, I think, since I came in. I fancy we shall have a storm."

"O, no," said George carelessly. Then he said: "Shall I read you my last chapter? I want to post it this evening. It's a funny chapter, mother. I bring in the queer old bookseller I told you about, who persisted in being his own banker."

"I remember, George. What are you looking at?" He had

taken up a letter from the table beside her, and was scrutinizing the address closely. "Are you admiring the handwriting? That is a letter from Clare Carruthers."

"O," said George. And he laid down the letter, and went to fetch his manuscript. So it was she who had forwarded Mr Felton's letters to him! Ellen must have asked her to do so—must, therefore, have talked of him—have mentioned him in some way. But had she done so in a manner to arouse any suspicion in Clare's mind of his identity? Did Clare remember him? Did she think of him? Would she forgive him when she should know all? These and scores of cognate questions did George Dallas put vainly to himself while he read to his mother a chapter of his novel, which certainly did not gain in effect by his abstraction. It pleased the listener, however, and she knew nothing of his pre-occupation; and as he made the packet up for post he came to a resolution that on the following day he would tell Harriet "all about it," and act on her advice.

With nightfall the wind arose, and a storm blew and raged over the little town, over the dark range of the Taunus, over the lighted gardens deserted by their usual frequenters, and, all unheeded, over the brilliant rooms where the play, and the dancing, and the music, the harmless amusement and the harmful devilment, went on just as usual. It blew over the house where Harriet lived, and raged against the windows of the room in which she sat in silence and darkness, except for the frequent glimmer which was thrown into the apartment from the street light, which shuddered and flickered in the rain and wind. Hour after hour she had sat there throughout the quiet evening during the lull, and when the darkness fell and the storm rose she laid her pale cheek against the window-pane and sat there still.

The shaded roads were deeply strewn with fallen leaves next day, and the sun-rays streamed far more freely through the branches, and glittered on pools of water in the hollows, and revealed much devastation among the flower-beds. Rain and wind had made a wide-spread excursion that night; had crossed the Channel, and rifted the gardens and the woods of Poynings, and.

swept away a heavy tribute from the grand avenue of beeches and the stately clump of sycamores which Clare Carruthers loved

George had finished a drawing very carefully from the sketch which he had made of the avenue of beeches, and, thinking over his approaching communication to Harriet, he had taken the drawing from its place of concealment in his desk, and was looking at it, wondering whether the storm of the past night had done mischief at the Sycamores, when a servant knocked at the door of his room. He put the drawing out of sight, and bade the man come in. He handed George a note from Harriet, which he read with no small surprise.

It told him that Routh had been summoned to London, on important business, by a telegram—"from that mysterious Flinders, no doubt," thought George, as he looked ruefully at the note—and that they were on the point of starting from Homburg. "Seven o'clock" was written at the top of the sheet. They were gone then; had been gone for hours. It was very provoking. How dreary the place looked after the storm! How chilly the air had become! How much he wished Arthur would "turn up," and that they might all get away!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SEVERING OF THE HAIR.

THE storm which had swept unheeded over the heads bent over the gaming-tables at the Kursaal that wild autumn night, was hardly wilder and fiercer than the tempest in Stewart Routh's soul, as he, making one of the number of the gamblers, played with a quite unaccustomed recklessness, and won with surprising sequence. This was earlier in the night, when the powers of the air were only marshalling their forces, and the elemental war had not extended beyond the skirmishing stage. Many times he

looked impatiently round, even while the ball was rolling, as if expecting to see some one, who still did not appear; then he would turn again to the green board, again stake and win, and resume his watch. At length a touch on his elbow caused him to look round in a contrary direction, where he saw a man standing, who immediately handed him a note and went away. Then Routh smiled, read the words the note contained, smiled again, swept up the money which lay before him, and left the room. The battle had fairly begun as he stepped out from the shelter of the portico, and, buttoning his coat tightly across his chest, and pulling his hat down to his eyebrows, set himself, with bent head, against the storm. His way led him past his own lodgings, and as he took it on the opposite side of the street, he saw, indistinctly, Harriet's figure, as she sat close beside the window, her head against the panes. Something dreary and forsaken in the aspect of the window, with its flimsy curtains wide apart, the indistinct form close against the glass, no light within the room, made Routh shiver impatiently as he looked at it; and just then the light in the street flickered and swerved violently under the influence of a sudden blast, which drove a sharp cascade of rain rattling against the window.

"Moping there in the dark," said Routh, with an oath, "and making things a hundred times worse, with her cursed whining and temper."

The Schwarzschild mansion was near, and he was soon removed as far from all associations with discomfort and dreariness as brilliant light, a blazing fire of odorous wood burning in a room too large to be overheated by it, luxurious surroundings, and pleasant expectation could remove him from such discordant realities. Presently Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge made her appearance. The room was a long one, and she entered by a door which faced the chimney where he was standing. Much as he had admired her, irresistibly as her beauty had captivated him with its ordinary charm of recklessness and lustre, with its rare, far-between moments of softness and grace, he had never really understood until now how beautiful she was. For there was a mingling of both moods upon her as she came towards him, her amber silk

dress, with the accustomed drapery of superb black lace falling round her, and sweeping the ground in folds such as surely no other mere gown, made by mundane milliner, had ever accomplished. Rich purple amethysts were on her neck and on her wrists, and gleamed on the comb which held the coils of her hair. Wax-lights in profusion shed their softened light upon her, upon the cream and rose tints of her brow and cheeks, upon the scarlet of her lips, upon the marvellous darkness of her eyes; and the capricious blaze from the burning logs shot quivering streaks of light among the folds of her dress, glancing over the jewels she wore, and playing redly on the hand which she held out, while yet some steps divided her from Routh, gazing at her in absorbed, almost amazed admiration.

"How tired and pale you look!" she said, as he took the proffered hand, and she allowed him to hold it. The words were slowly spoken, in the tone of solicitude for him, which is one of the most potent weapons in a beautiful woman's armoury. "Sit there," she went on, drawing her hand gently from his hold and indicating a seat, while she settled herself into the recesses of a huge German sofa. "How could you imagine I would go to the Kursaal to-night? Just listen!" She held her hand up; a cloud of filmy lace fell back from the beautiful round white arm. Then she dropped the hand slowly, and waited for him to speak. He spoke with strange difficulty; the spell of the power of her beauty was upon him. This was not what he had intended. He had meant to conquer, not to be conquered; to sway, not to be ruled.

"I thought," he said, in a low tone, "you would have come, because—I—I did not know you would allow me the happiness of coming here."

"Did you not? I think you don't understand me yet. I wished to see you, you know, and I did not wish to go out this evening. It is quite simple, is it not?"

"It is indeed, for such a woman as you."

She laughed.

"Is not that rather an awkward speech—rather an equivocal compliment? How *posed* you look!"

She laughed again. Routh felt unspeakably embarrassed; he

had a sense of being at a disadvantage, which was unpleasant. She saw it, and said :

"What a temper you have ! You'd be rather hard to please, I fancy, if one were in any sense bound to try."

"Don't jest with me," said Routh, suddenly and sternly, and he rolled his chair deliberately near her as he spoke. "You did not allow me, you did not invite me to come here to-night ; you did not do this, which seems so 'simple' to you, because you are as much braver than every other woman as you are more beautiful,"—he looked into her dark eyes, and their lids did not droop,—"only to jest with me, only to trifle with me, as you trifle with others. You are a wonderfully puzzling woman, I acknowledge ; no woman ever so puzzled me before. Each time I see you, there is something different, something new in your manner, and each time it is as though I had to begin all over again ; as if I had not told you that I love you, as if you had not listened and confessed that you know it. Why have you sent for me ? You dismissed me yesterday with something which you tried to make look and sound like anger—ineffectually, for you were not angry. And I was prepared for the same line of tactics to-day. Well, you send for me. I am here. You come to me a thousand times more beautiful"—he dropped his voice to a whisper, and she grew pale under the fixed fire of his eyes,—"*infinitely more beautiful than I have ever seen you ; and in your eyes and in your smile there is what I have never seen in them ; and yet you meet me with mere jesting words. Now, this you do not mean ; what is it that you do mean ?*"

He rose, and leaned against the mantelpiece, looking down upon her bent head, with the light shining on the jewels in her hair. She did not speak.

"What is that you *do* mean ?" he repeated. She had laid one arm along the cushioned side of the sofa, the side near him. He clasped it, above the wrist, impressively, not caressingly, and at the touch, the words he had spoken to her before, "Would you not be afraid of a man who loved you with all the passion of his heart ?" recurred to her, and she felt that so this man loved her, and that she was afraid of him.

"I dare say many others have loved you, and told you so," he continued, "and I don't ask you how you received their professions. I know the world too well, and what it brings to men and women, for any such folly. That is of the past. The present is ours. I ask you why you have brought me here? A woman who resents such words as those I have spoken to you before now, does not give a man the chance of repeating them. You have not sent for me to tell me that you are insulted and outraged, to talk the cant of a hypocritical society to me. I should not love you, beautiful as you are, if you were such a fool."

He saw that his audacity was not without its charm for her; her head was raised now, and her dark eyes, looking up, met his looking down, as she listened, with parted lips and deep-drawn breath.

"Be sure of this," he said, "no man has ever loved you as I love you, or been willing to stake so much upon your love." The sinister truth which lurked in these words lent the sinister expression to his face again for a moment which she had sometimes seen in it. "How much I stake upon it you will never know. So be it. I am ready, I am willing. You see I am giving you time. I am not hurrying you into rash speech. I dare say you were not at all prepared for this when you and I met, and you took the initiative in what you intended to be an ordinary watering-place flirtation—while you were waiting for Arthur Felton, perhaps?" he said, savagely, for, as he went on, the savage nature of the man was rising within him, and for all that his grasp was on her soft white arm, and his gaze was searching the depths of her dark eyes, he was speaking rather to himself than to her; rather to the unchained devil within, than to the beautiful fatality before him.

"It is possible you had some such notion," he said. "I don't ask you to acknowledge it, for if so, you have abandoned it." He stooped lower, his eyes looked closer into hers. She shrank back, and covered her face with her disengaged hand. "Yes," he went on, in a gentle tone, "I know you soon discovered that I am not made for make-believes; and now—now that you have sent for me, and I am here, what is it that you mean? You *cannot* make me the pastime of an hour; you *cannot* shake off the hold which

such love as mine lays upon your life—would still lay upon it were you a feebler woman than you are. What then? Are you going to take the wine of life, or are you going to content yourself with the vapid draughts you have hitherto drank? You must tell me, and tell me to-night, what it is you mean; for a crisis in my life is come, and I must know, without paltering or delay, how it is to be dealt with."

He lifted his hand from her arm, and standing directly before her, bade her look up and speak to him. She did not move. Then he sat down on a velvet footstool before her sofa, and drew her hands away from before her face. There were signs of agitation on it, and he read them, not quite correctly perhaps, but to his own satisfaction.

"Listen to me," he said, in the gentlest tones within the compass of his voice. "I have a right—have I not?—to ask you, to know what is your meaning towards me? What did you bring me here for? Remember the words I have spoken to you, not once only, or twice; remember the story I told you on the balcony yonder; remember the tone you have occasionally adopted in all your levity, and then do not attempt to deny my right to speak as I am speaking, and to demand your answer."

"You—you found me alone here—in my own house—and—"

"Absurd!" he cried. "You are talking nonsense, and you know it. Did you not intend me to understand that I should find you alone? Did your note, your summons (I tore it up, but you remember the words as well as I do), mean anything else? Do you not know this is all folly? There is no need to play with me. I am a sure prize or victim, which you please; you know that well enough, and I must know which you *do* please, for this is, as I said before, a crisis for me. Which is it?" he said, and he held her hands more tightly, and looked at her with a pale face. "Which is it? Mere coquetry—a dangerous game with a man like me I warn you—a game you won't find it possible to play; or—or the deep, deep love of a lifetime—the devotion which will never swerve or falter—the passion which will blot out from your knowledge or your fears everything beyond itself."

Weak, imaginative, without principle, easily ruled by strength,

though a despot to weakness, the woman he addressed listened to him like one in a dream. Not until afterwards did a sense of being tricked and trapped come to her. Had her demeanour towards Routh really implied all this! Had she yielded to the rapacity for admiration, to the thirst for conquest, which had always dominated in her nature, once too often, and far too completely? This was precisely what she had done, and she had fallen into the hands of a stronger being than herself. In a blind, vague, groping kind of way she felt this, and felt that she could not help or deliver herself, and felt it with something like fear, even while her imagination and her vanity were intoxicated by the mingling of defiance and pleading in his words, in his tones, and in his looks."

"You and I," he went on, "would say to others, would say to each other in some of our moods, or would have said when first we met, that no such thing as this all-sufficing love exists, but each of us knows well that it does, and may and *shall* be ours! This is what I mean. Again I ask you, what is *your* meaning in all this?"

"I don't know," she replied, releasing her hands, and rising. He allowed her to pass him, and to walk to the fireplace. She stood there, her radiant figure glittering in the lustre of the fire and the wax-lights. She stood there, her head bent, her hands before her, the fingers interlaced. After a minute, Routh followed her, and stood before her.

"Then you will not answer me—you will not tell me what your meaning was in sending for me to-night?"

There was tenderness in his tone now, and the slight inflection of a sense of injury which rarely fails with a woman.

"Yes," she said, looking up full at him, "I will tell you. I wanted to let you know that I think of going away."

"Going away!" cried Routh, in unbounded amazement—"Going away! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," she replied, recovering herself, and resuming her usual tone and manner as soon as he released her from the spell of his earnestness and passion—"I am going away. I don't treat you quite so badly as you try to make out, you see, or I

should not tell you about it, or consult you, or anything, but just go—go right away, you know, and make an end of it.”

Routh's stern face flushed, and then darkened with a look which Harriet had learned to know, but which Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge had never seen. She did not see it now, and continued:

“I sent for you to tell you this. I don't like the place; I'm tired of it. It's too small, and yet every one comes here, and I'm talked of. Ah, you sneer! Well, I know. I remember all I have said about that, but it is one thing to be talked of in London or Paris, and quite another to be the object of the daily curiosity and the malice—”

“You mean the envy, don't you?”

“No, I don't, I mean the malice; well the envy, or the malice, or only the observation, if you like, of always the same people, whom I meet in always the same places. This is a part of my reason, but only a part. I don't like Mr Felton, I don't like Mr Dallas; less than any people in the world I choose to have them to spy and overlook me; and—and—I don't want to be here when that man comes.”

Routh stood before her quite silent.

“You know—you remember,” she said with a smile, “Arthur Felton. By-the-by, you need not make faces about my wearing his photograph any more, for I've lost it—lost it before I got home yesterday. In fact, I suspect he is in some trouble—perhaps in some disgrace—and I have no fancy for being here when he arrives, to have him quarrelling with me if I avoid him, and his father regarding me with horror if I don't; so—” and here she knelt on the white rug and stretched out her hands to the fire, which shone reflected in her upraised eyes—“so I am going to—” She paused, tantalizing him.

“To—?” he repeated after her, almost in a whisper.

“To London,” she said; and laughed and looked at him, and rose. “Now sit down, and let us talk it over, and be reasonable.”

Still quite silent, Routh obeyed her. His manner, his look was changed. He was thoughtful; but an air of relief had come

upon him, as if unexpected help had reached him from an unforeseen quarter.

There was no light in the window, as Routh passed it by, returning to his lodgings. But there was a lamp in the hall, at which he lighted a candle, and went into the sitting-room.

Harriet was still sitting by the window; she did not raise or turn her head, and Routh thought she was sleeping. He went up close to her, and then she languidly opened her eyes and rose.

"Have you fallen asleep here, in the dark, Harriet?" said Routh, "and without a fire! How imprudent and unnecessary!"

"I am not cold," she said; but she shivered slightly as she spoke. Routh took up a shawl which lay upon a chair and wrapped it round her. She looked at him, quietly but sharply.

"Don't be afraid; I am all right to-night, Harry," he said. "I've won a lot of money at the tables, and I've been thinking over what we were saying this morning—" He paused a moment, and then went on with some constraint in his voice: "I think you are right so far, that the sooner we get away from this the better. I will consider the rest of the matter when we get to London."

Harriet looked at him still, closely and sharply, but she said nothing.

"You are too tired to talk about anything to-night, Harry, I see," said Routh, with good humour which did not sit on him very naturally, "so we will not talk. But would it be possible for you to be ready to start in the morning?"

"Yes," said Harriet, quietly, and without showing the least surprise by voice or countenance, "I will have everything ready."

Homburg von der Höhe was graced for only a few days longer by the beautiful American. Her pony-carriage and the gray ponies, the French groom, the luxurious wrappings, the splendid vision of satin, and lace, and jewels, all disappeared, and the Schwarzhild mansion was for a while desolate, until again occupied by the numerous progeny of a rich and rusty Queen's counsel.

It was understood that Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge had returned to Paris. "Every season is the right season for Paris with those Americans," said a contemptuous Briton, who secretly held himself aggrieved by the abrupt departure of the handsome widow, who had never appeared more than conscious of his existence, certainly not interested in the fact; "it draws them like a loadstone."

"She has evidently heard nothing of Arthur," said Mr Felton to his nephew, "or she would have sent us word."

He spoke timidly, and glanced at George with anxious eyes. George looked undisguisedly serious and troubled.

"I wish your letters had arrived, uncle," he replied. "I begin to fear we shall not see Arthur here; and—and to be sorry that so much time has been lost."

A week later George Dallas wrote to Harriet Routh from Paris as follows:

"Hôtel du Louvre, Paris, October.

"MY DEAR MRS ROUTH,—I am here with my uncle. My mother and Mr Carruthers are travelling more slowly. We are all to meet in London. Meantime a circumstance has occurred which may prove of great, and must be of some, importance to Mr Felton and to myself. I am compelled to ask your assistance, which I know you will give me with all your accustomed readiness and kindness.

"Accompanied by my uncle, I went this morning to a jeweller's shop in the Rue de la Paix to order the bracelet you know of to be re-made for my mother. I had not previously undone the packet containing the gold band and the turquoises, which you sealed up and kept in your desk for me, since the day you gave it to me at Homburg. The things were wrapped up in letter-paper, you will remember. I opened the packet on the counter of the jeweller's shop, shook the turquoises into a box he handed me for the purpose, and was holding up the gold band for him to examine, when my uncle, who was looking at the paper I had laid down, suddenly called to me, and pointing to some writing on it—mere memoranda, apparently, of articles to be purchased (I enclose a correct copy)—exclaimed, 'That is Arthur's writing!' I saw at

once that it was his writing, and determined to apply to you in the first place for information on the matter. It is now clear that my cousin has passed under another name than his own, and that Routh and perhaps you have known him. There is a date, too, upon the paper—10th of April of this year. You took the paper out of the lower division of your desk. You may be able to tell us all that we have so long been anxious to know, at once. Pray answer this without delay. I think it best not to write to Routh, because my uncle and he are almost strangers, and also, dear Mrs Routh, because it comes naturally to me to address myself to you. How strange that all this time you and Routh should have known Arthur, and I, living in intimacy with you both, should have been in a manner seeking him! You will, no doubt, be able to tell us everything without an hour's delay; but, in any case, we shall be in London in a week, and shall have Arthur's portrait to show you. I am sure this letter is very ill expressed, but I am still bewildered at the strangeness of the occurrence. Write at once. My room is No. 80.

“Always yours affectionately,

“GEORGE DALLAS.

“P. S. The jeweller of the Rue de la Paix is a jewel among his tribe. He undertakes to replace the diamonds, and, as far as I can judge—to be sure it's only a little way—with stones just as fine as those I sold at A—, for a third less than the money his Hebrew Dutch *confrère* gave me. I had a mind to tell him the value of the original diamonds, but I didn't—the honestest of the jewellers is only human, and it might tempt him to raise the price and not the value. But I think he recognized a master-mind in my uncle.”

CHAPTER XXX.

MOVING ON.

UNCONSCIOUS of the inquietude of her own brother and of her son, happy in a reunion which she had never ventured to hope for, still sufficiently weakened by her illness to be preserved from any mental investigation of "how things had come about," acquiescent and tranquil, Mrs Carruthers was rapidly getting well. The indelible alteration which her beauty had sustained—for it was beauty still—the beauty of a decade later than when George had seen his mother through the ball-room window at Poynings—had touched her morally as well as physically; and a great calm had come upon her with the silver streaks in her rich dark hair, and the fading of the colour in her cheek.

The relation between George's mother and her husband had undergone an entire change. Mr Carruthers had been excessively alarmed when he first realized the nature of his wife's illness. He had never come in contact with anything of the kind, and novelty of any description had a tendency to alarm and disconcert Mr Carruthers of Poynings. But he was not in the least likely to leave any manifest duty undone, and he had devoted himself, with all the intelligence he possessed (which was not much), and all the heart (which was a great deal more than he or anybody else suspected), to the care, attention, and "humouring" which the patient required. From the first, Mrs Carruthers had been able to recognize this without trying to account for it, and she unconsciously adopted the best possible method of dealing with a disposition like that of her husband. She evinced the most absolute dependence on him, and almost fretful eagerness for his presence, an entire forgetfulness of the former supposed immutable law which had decreed that the convenience and the pleasure of Mr Carruthers of Poynings were to take precedence, as a matter of course, of all other sublunary things. Indeed, it was merely in a technical sense that, as regarded the little world of Poynings, these had been considered sublunary. Its population concerned

themselves infinitely less with the "principalities and powers" than with the accuracy of the temperature of Mr Carruthers's shaving-water, and the punctuality with which Mr Carruthers's breakfast, lunch, and dinner were served. It had never occurred to his loving and dutiful wife that any alteration in this principle of life at Poynings could possibly be effected, and thus the more superficial faults of the character of a genuinely worthy man had been strengthened by the irresponsibility of his position until they bade fair to overpower its genuine worth. But all this had changed now, changed in a fashion against which there was no appeal. Mr Carruthers was no longer the first. His hours, his habits, his occupations, had to give way to the exigencies of a misfortune which struck him on the most sensitive point, and which invested him with a responsibility not to be trifled with or shared. It was characteristic of him that he became excessively proud of his care of his wife. The pomposity and importance with which he had been wont to "transact his public business" was now transferred to his superintendence of his patient; and the surveillance and fussiness which had made life rather a burdensome possession to the household and retainers of Poynings impressed themselves upon the physicians and attendants promoted to the honour of serving Mrs Carruthers. As they were, in the nature of things, only temporary inflictions, and were, besides, accompanied by remarkably liberal remuneration, the sufferers supported them uncomplainingly.

It was also characteristic of Mr Carruthers that, having made up his mind to receive George Dallas well, he had received him very well, and speedily became convinced that the young man's reformation was genuine, and would be lasting. Also, he had not the least suspicion how largely he was influenced in this direction by Mark Felton's estimate of the young man—an estimate not due to ignorance either, for George had hidden nothing in his past career from his uncle except his acquaintance with Clare Carruthers, and the strange coincidence which connected him with the mysterious murder of the 17th of April. Mr Carruthers, like all men who are both weak and obstinate, was largely influenced by the opinions of others, provided they were not forced

upon him or too plainly suggested to him, but that he was currently supposed to partake or even to originate them. He had not said much to his wife about her son ; he had not referred to the past at all.

It was in his honourable, if narrow, nature to tell her frankly that he had recognized his error, that he knew now that all his generosity, all the other gifts he had given her, had not availed, and could not have availed, while George's society had been denied ; but the *consigne* was, "Mrs Carruthers must not be agitated," and the great rule of Mr Carruthers's life at present was, that the *consigne* was not to be violated. Hence, nothing had been said upon the subject, and after the subsidence of her first agitation, Mrs Carruthers had appeared to take George's presence very quietly, as she took all other things.

The alteration which had taken place in his wife had tended to allay that unacknowledged ill which had troubled Mr Carruthers's peace, and exacerbated his temper. The old feeling of jealousy died completely out. The pale, delicate, fragile woman, whose mind held by the past now with so very faint a grasp, whose peaceful thoughts were of the present, whose quiet hopes were of the future, had nothing in common with the beautiful young girl whom another than he had wooed and won. As she was now, as alone she wished to be, he was first and chief in her life, and there was not a little exaction or temporary fretfulness, a single little symptom of illness and dependence, which had not in it infinitely more reassuring evidence for Mr Carruthers than all the observance of his wishes, and submission to his domestic laws, which had formerly made it plainer to Mr Carruthers of Poynings that his wife feared than that she loved him.

And, if it be accounted strange and bordering on the ludicrous that, at Mr Carruthers's respectable age, he should still have been subject to the feelings tauntingly mentioned as the "vagaries" of love, it must be remembered that George's mother was the only woman he had ever cared for, and that he had only of late achieved the loftier ideals of love. It was of recent date that he learned to hold his wife more dear and precious than Mr Carruthers of Poynings.

He was not in the least jealous of George. He liked him. He was clever, Mr Carruthers knew; and he rather disapproved of clever people in the abstract. He had heard, and had no reason to doubt—certainly none afforded by his step-son's previous career—that literary people were a bad lot. He supposed, innocent Mr Carruthers, that, to be literary, people must be clever. The inference was indisputable. But George did not bore him with his cleverness. He never talked about the *Piccadilly* or the *Mercury*, reserving his confidences on these points for his mother and his uncle. The family party paired off a good deal. Mr Carruthers and his wife, Mark Felton and his nephew. And then Mr Carruthers had an opportunity of becoming convinced that the doubts he had allowed to trouble him had all been groundless, and to learn by experience that, happy in her son's society, truly grateful to him for the kindness with which he watched George, she was happier still in his company.

To a person of quicker perception than Mr Carruthers, the fact that the invalid never spoke of her faithful old servant would have had much significance. It would have implied that she had more entirely lost her memory than other features and circumstances of her condition indicated, or that she had regained sufficient mental firmness and self-control to avoid anything leading directly or indirectly to the origin and source of a state of mental weakness of which she was distressingly conscious. But Mr Carruthers lacked quickness and experience, and he did not notice this. He had pondered, in his stately way, over Dr Merle's words, and he had become convinced that he must have been right. There had been a "shock." But of what nature? How, when, had it occurred? Clearly, these questions could not now, probably could not ever, be referred to Mrs Carruthers. Who could tell him? Clare? Had anything occurred while he had been absent during the days immediately preceding his wife's illness? He set himself now, seriously, to the task of recalling the circumstances of his return.

He had been met by Clare, who told him Mrs Carruthers was not quite well. He had gone with her to his wife's room. She was lying in her bed. He remembered that she looked pale and ill. She was in her dressing-gown, but otherwise dressed. Then

she had not been so ill that morning as to have been unable to leave her bed. If anything had occurred, it must have taken place after she had risen as usual. Besides, she had not been seriously ill until a day or two later—stay, until how many days? It was on the morning after Mr Dalrymple's visit that he had been summoned to his wife's room; he and Clare were at breakfast together. Yes, to be sure, he remembered it all distinctly. Was the "shock" to be referred to that morning, then? Had it only come in aid of previously threatening indisposition? These points Mr Carruthers could not solve. He would question Clare on his return, and find out what she knew, or if she knew anything. In the mean time, he would not mention the matter at all, not even to his wife's brother or her son. Mr Carruthers of Poynings had the "defects of his qualities," and the qualities of his defects, so that his pride, leading to arrogance in one direction, involved much delicacy in another, and this sorrow, this fear, this source, of his wife's suffering, whatever it might be, was a sacred thing for him, so far as its concealment from all hitherto unacquainted with it was concerned. Clare might help him to find it out, and then, if the evil was one within his power to remedy, it should be remedied; but in the mean time, it should not be made the subject of discussion or speculation. Her brother could not possibly throw any light on the cause of his wife's trouble; he was on the other side of the Atlantic when the blow, let it have come from whatever unknown quarter, had struck her. Her son! Where had he been? And asking himself this question, Mr Carruthers began to feel rather uncomfortably hot about the ears, and went creaking up the stairs to his wife's sitting-room, in order to divert his thoughts as soon as possible. He saw things by a clearer light now, and the recollection of his former conduct to George troubled him.

He found his step-son and Mark Felton in Mrs Carruthers's room. The day was chilly and gloomy, and eminently suggestive of the advantages possessed by an English country mansion over the most commodious and expensive of foreign lodging-houses. George had just placed a shawl round his mother's shoulders, and

was improving the fastenings of the windows, which were in their normal condition in foreign parts.

"Mark has been talking about Poynings," said Mrs Carruthers, turning to her husband with a smile, "and says he never saw a place he admired more, though he had only a passing glimpse of it."

Mr Carruthers was pleased, though of course it was only natural that Mr Felton should never have seen any place more to be admired by persons of well-regulated taste than Poynings.

"Of course," he said, with modest admission, "if you come to talk about the Dukeries, and that kind of thing, there's nothing to be said for Poynings. But *it is* a nice place, and I am very fond of it, and so is Laura."

He was rather alarmed, when he had said this, to observe his wife's eyes full of tears. Tears indicated recollection, and of a painful kind, he thought, being but little acquainted with the intricate symptoms of feminine human nature, which recollection must be avoided, or turned aside, in a pleasurable direction.

Now George's cleverness was a direction of the required kind, and Mr Carruthers proceeded to remark that George must make drawings for his mother of all the favourite points of view at Poynings.

"There's the terrace, George," he said, "and the 'Tangle,' where your mother loves to spend the summer afternoons, and there's the beech-wood, from the hill behind the garden, and the long avenue. There are several spots you will like, George, and—and," said Mr Carruthers, magnanimously, and blushing all over his not much withered face, like a woman, "I'm only sorry you are to make acquaintance with them so late in the day."

He put out his hand, with true British awkwardness, as he spoke, and the young man took it respectfully, and with an atoning pang of shame and self-reproach. But for his mother's presence, and the imperative necessity of self-restraint imposed by the consideration of her health and the danger of agitation to her, George would have inevitably told his step-father the truth. He felt all the accumulated meanness of an implied falsehood most deeply and bitterly, and might have been capable of forgetting even his

mother, but for a timely warning conveyed to him by the compressed lips and frowning brows of his uncle. As for his mother, neither he nor Mr Felton could judge of the effect produced upon her by the words of her husband. She had turned away her head as he began to speak.

"I was just going to tell Laura what I thought of doing, if you and she approve," Mr Felton hastened to say. "You see, I am getting more and more anxious about Arthur, and I don't think he will turn up here. I thought if George and I were to go on to Paris and make some inquiries there—I know pretty well where he went to there, and what he did—we need not make more than a few days' delay, and then go on to London, and join you and Laura there. What do you say?"

"I think it would do nicely," said Mr Carruthers. "You and George would hardly like our rate of travelling under any circumstances." It would have afforded any individual endowed with good humour and a sense of the ludicrous great amusement to observe the pleasure and importance with which Mr Carruthers implied the seriousness of his charge, and the immense signification of a journey undertaken by Mrs Carruthers of Poynings. "We shall stay some time in town," he continued, "for additional medical advice; and then, I hope, we shall all go down to Poynings together."

"I have secured rooms for George and myself in Piccadilly," said Mark Felton, in a skilfully off-hand manner. "It would never do for two jolly young bachelors like him and me to invade Sir Thomas Boldero's house. Even"—and here Mr Felton's countenance clouded over, and he continued absently—"even if Arthur did not join us; but I hope he will—I hope he will."

Mr Carruthers was singularly unfortunate in any attempt to combine politeness with insincerity. He had a distinct conviction that his wife's nephew was a "good-for-nothing," of a different and more despicable order of good-for-nothingness from that which he had imputed to his step-son in his worst days; and though he would have been unfeignedly pleased had Mr Felton's inquietude been set at rest by the receipt of a letter from his son, he was candidly of opinion that the longer that young gentleman abstained

from joining the family-party, the more peaceful and happy that family-party would continue to be.

However, he endeavoured to rise to the occasion, and said he hoped "Mr Arthur" would accompany his father to Poynings, with not so very bad a grace considering.

The diversion had enabled George to recover himself, and he now drew a chair over beside his mother's, and began to discuss the times and distances of their respective journeys, and other cognate topics of conversation. Mr Carruthers liked everything in the planning and settling line, and it was quite a spectacle to behold him over the incomprehensible pages of Bradshaw, emphasizing his helplessness with his gold spectacles.

"I suppose ten days will see us all in London," he said to Mr Felton, "if you leave this with George to-morrow, and we leave on Monday. I have written to my niece. Sir Thomas and Lady Boldero never come to town at this season, so I have asked Clare to come up and see that the house is all comfortable for Laura. Clare can stay at her cousin's till we arrive."

"Her cousin's?" asked Mark Felton; and George blessed him for the question, for he did not know who was meant, and had never yet brought himself to make an inquiry in which Clare Carruthers was concerned, even by implication.

"Mrs Stanhope, Sir Thomas's daughter," said Mr Carruthers; "she was married just after we left Poynings."

"The young lady of whom Captain Marsh made such appropriate mention," thought George.

"I have no town-house," continued Mr Carruthers with more of the old pompous manner than Mr Felton had yet remarked in him. "Laura prefers Poynings, so do I; and as my niece came down only this spring and has been detained in the country by several causes, we have not thought it necessary to have one."

"I should think you would find a town-house a decided nuisance," said Mr Felton, frankly; "and if Miss Carruthers has Sir Thomas Boldero's and Mrs Stanhope's to go to, I don't see that she wants anything more."

"You forget," said Mr Carruthers in a quiet tone, which, nevertheless, conveyed to Mr Felton's quick apprehension that he had

made a grave mistake, and implied to perfection the loftiness of rebuke—"you forget that Miss Carruthers is the heiress of Poynings!"

"Ah, to be sure, so I do," said Mark Felton, heartily, "and I beg her pardon and yours; but at least I shall never forget that she is the most charming girl I ever saw in my life." And then, as if a secret inspiration led him to put the question which George longed to hear and dared not ask, he said:

"When is Miss Carruthers to arrive in London?"

"Only three or four days before we shall get there, I fancy. My love," turning abruptly to Mrs Carruthers, as a happy idea struck him, by which her additional comfort might be secured, "what would you think of my desiring Clare to bring Brookes up with her? Should you like to have her with you when you are in town?"

Mrs Carruthers turned a face full of distress upon her husband in reply to his kind question. It was deeply flushed for a moment, then it grew deadly pale; her eyes rolled towards George with an expression of doubt, of searching, of misty anguish which filled him with alarm, and she put out her hands with a gesture of avoidance.

"O no, no," she said, "I cannot see her yet—I am not able—I don't know—there's something, there's something."

It might have struck Mr Carruthers and Mark Felton too, had they not been too much alarmed to think of anything but Mrs Carruthers's emotion, that when they both approached her eagerly, George did not attempt to do so. He rose, indeed, but it was to push back his chair and get out of their way. Mr Carruthers asked her tenderly what was the matter, but she replied only by laying her head upon his breast in a passion of tears.

In the evening, when Dr Merle had seen Mrs Carruthers, had said a great deal about absolute quiet, but had not interdicted the purposed return to England, when it had been decided that there was to be no leave-taking between her and her brother and son, who were to commence their journey on the morrow, Mr Carruthers, sitting by his wife's bed, where she then lay quietly asleep, arrived at the conclusion that the old nurse was connected with

the "shock." The idea gave him acute pain. It must have been, then, something that had some reference to his wife's past life, something in which he and the present had no share. Very old, and worn, and troubled Mr Carruthers looked as the darkness came on and filled the room, and once more the night wind arose, and whistled and shrieked over Taunus. He began to wish ardently, earnestly, to get home. It was very strange to look at his wife, always before his eyes, and know she had a terrible secret grief, which had thus powerfully affected her, and not to dare to question her about it. This fresh confirmation of the fact, this new manifestation of her sufferings, after so peaceful an interval, had in it something awful to the mind of Mr Carruthers.

The brother and the son in their different ways were equally disturbed by the occurrence—Mark Felton in his ignorance and conjecture, George in the painful fulness of his knowledge and his self-reproach.

And as Mark Felton's look had alone arrested George's impulsive desire to reveal his knowledge of Poynings to Mr Carruthers, so the remembrance of all Routh and Harriet had said to him of the difficulty, the embarrassment, the probable danger of an acknowledgment, alone arrested his desire to inform his uncle of the dreadful error which had caused his mother's illness.

Mark Felton and George Dallas left Homburg for Paris on the following day. They had separated for the night earlier than usual, and George had employed himself for some hours in writing a long and confidential letter to his friend Cunningham. It was addressed to that gentleman at the *Mercury* office, and it contained full details of every particular which he had been able to learn connected with his missing cousin. The purpose of the letter was an urgent request that Cunningham would at once communicate with the police on this matter, and it concluded with these words :

"I cannot conquer my apprehensions, and I will not yet communicate them to my uncle. But, mark this, I am convinced we shall learn nothing good at Paris ; and we have done very wrong in not putting the police to work long ago. Don't laugh at me, and call me a novelist in action. I never felt so sure of anything I had not seen as I am of Arthur Felton's having come to serious grief."

CHAPTER XXXI.

PAUL WARD.

THE autumn tints were rich and beautiful upon the Kent woods, and nowhere more rich or more beautiful than in Sir Thomas Boldero's domain. The soft grass beneath the noble beeches was strewn with the russet leaves a little earlier than usual that year, and somewhat more plentifully, for the storm had shaken them down, and had even rent away a branch here and there from some of the less sturdy trees. And then the forester made his inspection, and the fallen branches were removed, and duly cut and housed for winter fire-wood, and it chanced that the hitherto forgotten log on which George Dallas had sat one spring morning was carried away with them.

Clare Carruthers missed it from its accustomed place as she rode down the glade which she still loved, though it had a painful association for her now. Every day her eyes had rested on the rugged log, and every day she had turned them away with a sigh. To-day it was there no longer, and its absence was a relief. She reined Sir Lancelot up for a moment, and looked at the vacant space. The earth lay bare and brown where the log had been; there was no grass there.

"It won't be hidden until the spring," she thought, impatiently. "I wish—I wish I could forget the place in which I saw him first! I wish I could forget that I ever had seen him!"

Then she turned her head away with an effort and a sigh, and rode on.

Clare was going over from the Sycamores to Poynings. She had occasion to see the housekeeper, started early, and, as usual, unattended, save by Caesar, who bounded along now by the side of Sir Lancelot, anon a considerable way in advance, doing the distance twice over, after the fashion of dogs, and evidently compassionating the leisurely pace to which his equine friend and comrade was condemned.

The months which had elapsed since her inauspicious meeting

among the beeches with Paul Ward had had much inquietude and mysterious trouble in them for the girl whose graces they had but ripened and perfected, on whose fair face they had impressed a premature but very beautiful thoughtfulness. To one so young, so innocent, so carefully shielded from evil, living in so pure and calm an atmosphere of home, and yet around whom the inevitable solitude of orphanhood dwelt, the presence of a secret cause of sorrow, doubt, perplexity, was in itself a burden grievous to be borne. Clare could not help dwelling perpetually on the only mystery which had ever come into her tranquil conventional life, and the more she shrank from the contemplation, the more it pressed itself upon her. Sometimes, for days and weeks together, the remembrance of it would be vague and formless, then it would take shape again and substance, and thrill her with fresh horror, distract her with new perplexity. Sometimes she would address herself with all the force of her intelligence to this mysterious remembrance, she would arrange the circumstances in order and question them, and then she would turn away from the investigation cold and trembling, with all the terrible conviction of the first moment of revelation forcibly restored.

The dreadful truth haunted her. When Sir Thomas Boldero asked her ladyship if there was any news in the *Times* each morning (for the Sycamores was governed by other laws than those which ruled Poynings, and Lady Boldero, who was interested in politics after her preserves and her linen-presses, always read the papers first), Clare had listened with horrid sickening fear for many and many a day. But suspense of this sort cannot last in its first vitality, and it had lessened, but it was not wholly dead even yet. One subject of speculation frequently occupied her. Had he seen the warning she had ventured to send him? No, she would sometimes say to herself, decisively, no, he had not seen it. His safety must have been otherwise secured; if he had seen it, he would know that the terrible truth was known to her, and he would never have dared to recall himself to her memory. For he did so recall himself, and this was the most terrible part of it all for Clare. On the first day of each month she received the current number of the *Piccadilly*, and there was always written on

the fly-leaf, "From Paul Ward." No, her attempt had failed; such madness, such audacity, could not otherwise be accounted for. For some time Clare had not looked at the books which reached her with this terribly significant imprint. She had not destroyed them, but she had put them away out of her sight. One day, after her cousin's marriage, and when her thoughts—forcibly distracted for some time by the preparations, the hospitalities, and the rejoicings attendant on that event—had flown back to the subject which had such tormenting attraction for her, a sudden impulse of utter incredulity seized her. Nothing was changed in the facts, nothing in the circumstances; but Clare laid aside reason under the suddenly exerted power of feeling, and refused to believe that Paul Ward had murdered the unknown man in whose company he had been, and who undoubtedly had been murdered.

"I *won't* believe it! I don't believe it!"

These words have often been uttered by the human will, when tortured by the terrible impotence of human despair, as unreasonably, as obstinately, as Clare Carruthers spoke them, and with infinitely more suffering implied in the inevitable reaction. But they can seldom have brought greater relief. A generous, reckless impulse of youth, partly against the terrible knowledge of evil, partly against her own suffering, which wearied and oppressed her spirit, distant, vague, even chimerical as she told herself it was, animated her resolution. She rose, and stretched her arms out, and shook her golden head, as though she discarded a baleful vision by a strong act of her will.

"I shall never see him again," she thought. "I shall never know his fate, unless, indeed, he becomes famous, and the voice of his renown reaches me. I shall never know the truth of this dreadful story; but, strong as the evidence is, I never will believe it more. Never, never!"

Clare Carruthers was too young, too little accustomed to the sad science of self-examination, too candidly persuadable by the natural abhorrence of youth for grief, to ask herself how much of this resolution came from the gradual influence of time—how much from the longing she felt to escape from the constant pressure of the first misery she had ever known. The impulse, the resolution,

had come to her, with her first waking thoughts,—one glorious morning in the early autumn—the morning which saw George Dallas and his uncle arrive at Homburg, and witnessed Mr Carruthers's reception of his step-son. This resolution she never abandoned. That day she had taken the books out of their hiding-place, and had set herself to read the serial story which she knew was written by him. Something of his mind, something of his disposition, would thus reveal itself to her. It was strange that he remembered to send her the books so punctually, but that might mean nothing; they might be sent by the publisher, by his order. He might have forgotten her existence by this time. Clare was sensible, and not vain, and she saw nothing more than a simple politeness in the circumstance. So she read the serial novel, and thought over it; but it revealed nothing to her. There was one description, indeed, which reminded her, vaguely, of Mrs Carruthers, as she had been before her illness, as Clare remembered her, when she had first seen her, years ago. Clare liked the story. She was not enthusiastically delighted with it. A change which her newly-formed resolution to believe him innocent, to chase from her all that had tormented her, could never undo, had passed upon Clare, since her girlish imagination had been ready to exalt Paul Ward, "the author," Paul Ward, "the artist," as she had called him, with all the reverence her innocent heart accorded to such designations, into a hero; she had less impulse in her now, she had suffered, in her silent unsuspected way, and suffering is a sovereign remedy for all enthusiasm except that of religion. But she discerned in the story something which made her reason second her resolution. And from that day Clare grieved no more. She waited, she did not know for what; she hoped, she did not know why; she was pensive, but not unhappy. She was very young, very innocent, very trustful; and the story of the murder was six months old. So was that of the meeting, and that of the myrtle-sprig; and all three were growing vague.

The young girl's thoughts were very busy as she rode from the Sycamores to Poynings, but not exclusively with Paul Ward.

Her life presented itself in a more serious aspect to her then than it had ever before worn. All things seemed changed. Her

uncle's letters to her had undergone a strange alteration. He wrote now to her as to one whom he trusted, to whom he looked for aid, on whom he purposed to impose a responsible duty. The pompousness of Mr Carruthers's nature was absolutely inseparable from his style of writing as from his manner of speech, but the matter of his letters atoned for their faults of manner. He wrote with such anxious affection of his wife, he wrote with such kindly interest of Mr Dallas, the hitherto proscribed step-son, whose name Clare had never heard pronounced by his lips or in his presence. Above all, he seemed to expect very much from Clare. Evidently her life was not to be empty of interest for the future, if responsibility could fill it; for Clare was to be intrusted with all the necessary arrangements for Mrs Carruthers's comfort, and Mrs Carruthers was very anxious to get back to England, to Poynings, and to Clare! The girl learned this with inexpressible gladness, but some surprise. She was wholly unaware of the feelings with which Mrs Carruthers had regarded her, and the intentions of maternal care and tenderness which she had formed—feelings she had hidden, intentions she had abandoned from motives of prudence founded on her thorough comprehension of the besetting weakness of her husband's character.

Clare had not the word of the enigma, and it puzzled her. But it delighted her also. Instinctively she felt there was something of Mark Felton's doing in this. He had impressed her as favourably as she had impressed him. She had recognized his possession of the two great qualities, feeling and intelligence, and her own kindred endowments had answered to them at once.

Was she going to be happy and useful? Was she going to be something more than the rich Miss Carruthers, the heiress of Poynings, who had every luxury life could supply, except that of feeling herself of active individual importance to any living creature? Was Poynings going to be as pleasant as the Sycamores, and for a more worthy reason? Clare felt in her honest young heart that the superiority of the Sycamores consisted principally in the fact that the uncle who inhabited that abode was never in her way, whereas the uncle who ruled at Poynings was generally otherwise, and unpleasant. It was very ungrateful of her to feel

this ; but she did feel it. Was all this going to be altered ? Was she going to have the sort of feeling that might have been hers if she had not been the heiress of Poynings, but the real, own daughter of a kind lady who needed and would accept all her girlish love and eager, if unskilful, care ? It must be so, Clare thought, now Mrs Carruthers had her son with her, and she no longer felt that there was injustice done to her, for which Clare was made the reason or the pretext, she would allow her to be all she had always desired to be. How much uselessness, unreality, weariness, fell away from Clare Carruthers as she rode on, the beautiful healthful colour rising higher in her cheeks as the glad thoughts, the vague, sweet, unselfish hopes of the future, expanded in her young heart ! She would tell Mrs Carruthers some day when she was quite well, when there should be no longer any danger of doing her harm by the revelation, about the mystery which had caused her so much suffering, and then, when there should be perfect confidence between them, she would tell her how she had discovered that she, too, was acquainted with Paul Ward.

Clare had never speculated seriously upon the cause of Mrs Carruthers's illness. Her first convictions were, that it had originated in some trouble about her son. The old housekeeper's manner, the removal of the portrait, had sufficed for Clare. This was a sacred sorrow, sacred from Clare's curiosity, even in her thoughts. And now it was at an end, probably thanks to Mark Felton ; but, at all events, it was quite over. In the time to come, that future which Clare's fancy was painting so brightly, as her horse carried her swiftly over the familiar road, Mrs Carruthers might even love her well enough to tell her the story of the past, and what that terrible grief had been.

"I am to take Thomas up to town with me, Mrs Brookes, and I only wish you were coming too," said Clare to the housekeeper at Poynings, as a concluding item of the budget of news she had to tell. Clare was in high spirits by this time. Mrs Brookes was much more friendly than usual to the young lady, whom she, too, had always regarded with jealousy, and almost dislike, as the enemy of George.

"I am better here, Miss Carruthers," said Mrs Brookes. "I daresay there won't be much delay in London—for Mrs Carruthers and master, I mean. You'll stay awhile with Mrs Stanhope, be-like?"

"O dear no—I certainly shall not," replied Clare, with the prettiest air of importance. "I shall come down with my uncle and aunt. My uncle says we are to come as soon as the doctors will let us go."

"And Mr Felton also, you say, Miss Carruthers?"

"Yes, and Mr Dallas. How delighted I am, Mrs Brookes—how delighted you must be!" The girl's face flushed deeply. She was all glowing with the generous ardour of her feelings. She had taken off her hat, and was standing before the open window in the morning-room, her habit gathered up in one hand, her slight figure trembling, her beautiful face radiant.

"I am sure it has been almost as hard for you as for his mother. I could not say anything about it before, Nurse Ellen"—it was the first time Clare had ever called the old woman by this name—"because—because I knew nothing—no one ever told me anything, and I must have seemed to blame my uncle. But, indeed, it pained me very much, and now—now I am so happy!"

Bright swift tears sparkled in her golden-brown eyes. She dashed them away, and, taking the old woman's hands in hers, she said, with girlish archness,

"You must not hate me any more, Nurse Ellen, for 'Master George' and I are going to be very good friends."

"Hate you, my dear young lady!" said Mrs Brookes, who was too old to blush externally, but who certainly felt like blushing. "How can you have such fancies? Who could hate *you*?"

"You—you dear, faithful old thing! But it's all right now; and, Nurse Ellen," she said, seriously, "I am sure we owe all this happy change to Mr Felton. The moment I saw that man, I felt he had come to do good. By-the-by, my uncle tells me there is no news of Mr Felton's son yet. I suppose you never saw him, nurse?"

"La, bless you, no, my dear. I never saw his father till the day he came here. Mr Arthur was born in America."

"Did he ever come to England before? Did Mrs Carruthers ever see him?"

"Never. He told his father he would see his aunt the first thing he did, and he never came anigh the place. I doubt he's a black sheep, Miss Carruthers."

"I hope not, for his father's sake, nurse."

And then Clare proceeded to make various arrangements with Mrs Brookes, thinking the while: "Arthur Felton never was here. Mrs Carruthers never saw him. For a moment I fancied he might have been Paul Ward."

"I wonder what I shall think of George Dallas?" thought Clare as she rode away from Poynings in the afternoon, having given Thomas the necessary orders. "I wonder what he will think of me? I dare say he does not like the idea of me much. Perhaps I should not like the idea of *him*, if he were in my place and I in his; but, as it is, *I decidedly do.*"

Attended by her maid and Thomas, Miss Carruthers went to London on the following day. Mrs Stanhope met her at the railway station, and took her home with her. The footman was despatched to Sir Thomas Boldero's house in Chesham-place. In the course of the evening he went to Mrs Stanhope's house, and asked to see Clare. His errand was to inform her that Mr Felton and Mr Dallas had arrived in London, and were particularly desirous of seeing Miss Carruthers. He (Thomas) had Mr Felton's orders to ascertain from Miss Carruthers whether she would see them, on the following day, at Chesham-place, and if so, at what hour. He was to take her answer to Mr Felton's lodgings in Piccadilly.

"When did the gentlemen arrive?" Miss Carruthers asked.

Thomas could not say exactly, but he thought they had only just reached London. They had overcoats on, and looked "travelers-like."

Clare sent word to Mr Felton that she should be at Chesham-place at noon the next day, and would be very happy to see him. She did not mention Mr Dallas, but it was by no means necessary she should do so.

Punctually at twelve on the following day, Mrs Stanhope's brougham deposited Clare Carruthers at Sir Thomas Boldero's house. It was in process of preparation for the expected guests ; but had not quite thrown off the drowsy unoccupied look of a house whose owners were absent. Its appearance bore the same relation to the state it would assume by-and-by as that of an individual who has just persuaded himself to rise, and is yawning and shivering in the process, bears to that of the same individual in his tubbed, dressed, shaved, breakfasted, newspaper-read, hatted, gloved, and ready-for-the-day condition.

Clare got out of the carriage, gave the coachman some directions, stood at the door until he had driven off, and made a remark or two (ever reminiscent of Poynings punctiliousness) relative to the area-railings and door-steps to Thomas before she entered the house. He listened gravely, promised to attend to these matters, and then said :

" Mr Dallas has been here some time, ma'am."

" Indeed ! " said Clare, pausing just inside the hall-door. " Is Mr Felton not here ? "

" He will be here directly, ma'am. He came with Mr Dallas, but went away again. I showed Mr Dallas into the study, ma'am."

Clare felt rather embarrassed. She wished Mrs Stanhope had been with her—she wished Mr Felton had remained until she came, or had taken his nephew with him. It was so awkward to have to introduce herself to George Dallas, a stranger, and yet not exactly a stranger. She hesitated ; her colour rose. What should she do ? What was not the easiest or pleasantest thing to do—for that would be to go to the drawing-room and remain there until Mr Felton should come, leaving Mr Dallas to a similar vigil in the study—but the kindest. Clearly, to give Mrs Carruthers's son the friendliest greeting in her power, to show him, in her little way, how pleased she was at the family reunion, how much she desired to be numbered among his friends.

The study windows faced the street ; he had probably seen the carriage, and heard her voice. He might be even now hurt by her tarrying.

Clare delayed no longer. She crossed the hall, opened the door

of Sir Thomas Boldero's study, saw a man's figure close to one of the windows, shut the door, took two or three steps, and said, in the sweet gentle tone which was one of her peculiar charms :

"Mr Dallas, I am so much pleased."

Then the figure turned away from the window, and Clare found herself in the presence of Paul Ward.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER RECOGNITION.

THE same day which had witnessed the departure from Homburg of Mr and Mrs Carruthers, and the commencement of the journey which had London for its destination, beheld that city in an unusually agreeable aspect in point of weather. The sun was warm and bright ; the sadness and sweetness of autumn filled the air, and lent their poetical charm to the prosaic streets, and impressed themselves sensibly and unacknowledged upon the prosaic dwellers therein. People who had no business or pleasure, or combination of both, to call them abroad, went out on that day, and rode or drove or walked, because the rare beauty and charm of the day imperatively required such homage. Women and children were out in the Parks, and, but for the fallen leaves upon the ground, and the peculiar sigh which made itself heard now and again among the trees—a sound which the ear that has once learned to distinguish it never fails to catch when the summer is dead—the summer might be supposed to be still living.

The brightest thoroughfare in London, Piccadilly, was looking very bright that autumn day, with all the windows of the few houses which can lay claim to anything of the beauty of grandeur glittering in the sun, and an astounding display of carriages, considering the season, enlivening the broad sloping road. The Greek Park was dotted over with groups of people, as in the summer-time, and along the broad path beyond the iron railings solitary pedes-

trians walked or loitered, unmolested by weather, just as it suited their fancy. The few and far-between benches had their occupants, of whom some had books, some cigars, and some babies. Perambulators were not wanting, neither were irascible elderly gentlemen to swear at them. It was happily too hot for hoops.

This exceptional day was at its best and brightest when Harriet Routh came down the street in which she lived, crossed Piccadilly, and entered the Park. She was, as usual, very plainly dressed, and her manner had lost none of its ordinary quietude. Nevertheless, a close observer would have seen that she looked and breathed like a person in need of free fresh air, of movement, of freedom; that though the scene, the place in which she found herself, was indifferent to her, perhaps wholly unobserved by her, the influence upon her physical condition was salutary. She did not cross the grass, but walked slowly, and with her eyes turned earthwards, along the broad path near the railings. Occasionally she looked up, and lifted her head, as if to inhale as much as possible of the fresh air, then fell into her former attitude again, and continued her walk. Her face bore an expression of intense thought—the look of one who had brought a subject out with her in her mind, which subject she was resolved to think out, to look at in every aspect, to bring to a final decision. She kept a straight, clear course in her walk, looking neither to the right nor to the left, pondering deeply, as might have been seen by the steady tension of her low white forehead and the firm set of her lips. At last she paused, when she had traversed the entire length of the walk several times, and looked about her for an unoccupied seat. She descried one, with no nearer neighbour than the figure of a boy, not exactly ragged, but very shabby, extended on the grass beside it, resting on his elbows, with a fur cap pulled down over his eyes, leaving the greater portion of a tangled head exposed to view, and a penny illustrated journal, whose contents, judging by the intentness with which he was devouring them, must have been of a highly sensational character, stretched out on the ground before him. Harriet took no notice of the boy, nor did he perceive her, when she seated herself on the bench by which he lay. She sat down noiselessly, folded her hands, and let her head

fall forward, looking out with the distant absorbed gaze which had become habitual to her. She sat very still, and never for a moment did the purpose in her face relax. She was thinking, she was not dreaming.

After a while she looked at her watch, and rose. At the first step which she made on the grass, and towards the railings, her silk dress rustled over the outspread paper from which the boy was reading. She looked down, apologetically; the boy looked up angrily, and then Mr James Swain jumped up, and made the movement which in his code of manners passed for a bow to Harriet.

"Ah, is it you, Jim?" she said. "Are you not busy to-day?"

"No, mum, I ain't," said Jim. "Mr Routh hadn't no messages this mornin', and I ain't been lucky since."

"It's a nice day for you to have a little time to yourself," said Harriet. "I hope you got all the commissions I left for you."

"I did, mum, and thank'ee," said Jim. Harriet had remembered the street-boy when she was leaving home, and had charged her servants to employ him. She had not the slightest suspicion of the extensive use which Routh was in the habit of making of his services.

"The windows is to be cleaned," said Jim, suggestively. "There warn't time, mum; you come home so unexpected."

"Very well," said Harriet. "I suppose you can clean them, can't you?"

"Mr Harris said as I might try," returned Jim. Mr Harris was the irreproachable man-servant attached to Routh's modest establishment in Mayfair.

Harriet moved on, and Jim Swain stood still, looking after her. She was a puzzle to him, and an object of constant interest. By little and little Jim had come to know a good deal about Stewart Routh and his daily life, and he had abandoned the first theory which had presented itself to his mind, and which had owed its inspiration to the illustrated penny literature which formed his intellectual food. He no longer believed Harriet a persecuted victim of her husband's groundless jealousy. For reasons of his own, equally strong and secret, Mr James Swain had taken a lively interest in George Dallas, had experienced certain emotions on

seeing him, and had taken very kindly to the business of espionage in which Routh had engaged his services, without affording him any indication of its purpose. At first the boy had conceived an idea that Dallas was the object of Harriet's supposed preference and Routh's supposed jealousy, but he abandoned that notion very speedily, and since then he had not succeeded in forming any new theory to his satisfaction. From the conversation of the servants, Jim had learned that Mr Dallas and Mr Felton, with whose personal appearance the boy was equally familiar, had gone to the same place in foreign parts as that to which Mr and Mrs Routh had gone a little later, and knowing this, Jim thought more and more frequently over certain circumstances which he had kept to himself with extraordinary discretion—discretion, indeed, which nothing but the strongest possible sense of self-interest, as inseparable from its observance, could have enabled him to preserve.

“He don't like him,” Jim would say to himself, with frequent repetition, “he don't like him, can't abear him; I knows that precious well. And he can't be afraid of him, as I can see, for he certainly warn't neither in nor near *that* business, and I'm blest if he knows anythin' about it. Wotever can he want to know all about him for, and keep a-follerin' him about? It ain't for no good as *he* follers anybody, I'll take my davy.” And Mr James Swain's daily reflections invariably terminated with that formula, which was indeed a simple and accurate statement of the boy's belief. His abandonment of his theories concerning Harriet had worked no change in his mind towards Routh. His familiarity with Routh's servants, his being in a manner free of the house—free, but under the due amount of inspection and suspicion justified by his low estate—enlightened him as to Harriet's domestic position, and made him wonder exceedingly, in his half-simple, half-knowing way, how “the like of her could be spoony on sich a cove as him,” which was Mr James Swain's fashion of expressing his sense of the moral disparity between the husband and wife.

This was the second time that Jim had seen Mrs Routh since her return from the trip which he had been told was specially undertaken for the benefit of her health. The first time was on the day of her arrival, when Jim had fortunately been “handy,” and

had helped with the luggage. He had made his observations then upon Harriet's appearance with all his native impudence ; for though the element of suspicion, which lent his interest in Harriet something tragic, had died out of it, that interest continued lively ; but he had admitted that it was pardonable that she should look "precious blue and funky" after a journey.

But looking at her more attentively on this second occasion, and when there was no journey in the case, Jim arrived at the conclusion that whatever had "ailed" Mrs Routh before she left home ailed her still.

"Uncommon ill she do look, to be sure," he said to himself, as he crumpled up the exciting fiction which he had been reading, and which "left off" at a peculiarly thrilling crisis, and wedged the illustrated journal into his cap ; "uncommon ill. Wot's the good of all them baths and things, if she's to come back lookin' like this—a deal worse, *I* call it, and much miserabler in her mind? Wotever ails her?"

At this point in his cogitations Jim began to move on, slowly indeed, and keeping his eye on Harriet, who had reached one of the gates of the Park opening into Piccadilly, had passed through it, and was just about to cross to the opposite side. She stood for a moment irresolute, then turned, came through the gate again, and rapidly approached Jim, beckoning him towards her as she came.

She stood still as the boy ran up to her, and pointed to one of the smaller but much decorated houses on the opposite side of the way.

"Jim," she said, "you see that house, where the wide windows are, all one pane, and the bright balconies there, the house with the wide door, and the heavy carved railings?"

"Yes, mum, I see," said Jim.

"Go to that house, and ask if anything has been heard from Mr Felton. Ask when he is expected—he has taken lodgings there—whether any other gentleman is expected to come with him—and, Jim, be sure to ask in particular whether any letters have been received for Mr Felton, and sent on to him."

Jim Swain looked at Harriet. There was something strange as

well as intelligent in the look, but she saw only the intelligence. It harmonized with the thought in her own mind, and she replied to it:

"You think, perhaps, they may not like to tell you," she said. "Perhaps they may not. But you may tell whoever answers you that Mr Felton's sister wishes to know—" Jim still looked at her, and Harriet felt that he did so, but this time she did not catch his eye. "Be quick," she said, "and bring me the answer yonder." She pointed to the bench on which she had been sitting, and which was beyond the reach of observation from the house she had indicated, and walked away towards it as she ceased speaking. "It cannot be helped," she said. "The risk is a trifling one at worst, and must be run. I could not put Harris in communication with any one on a false pretext, and I can trust this boy so far not to say he has asked this question for me. I cannot bear it any longer. I must know how much time there is before me. I *must* have so much certainty; if not, I shall go mad."

She had reached the bench now, and sat down in the former attitude.

"Once before I asked myself," she muttered, "if I was going mad. I did not feel more like it then than now—not so like it, indeed. I knew what he was doing then, I had found him out. But I don't know now—I don't know now. I am in the dark, and the tide is rising."

Jim came back from his errand. He had been civilly answered by a woman-servant. Mr Felton was expected in a few days; the exact day was not yet named. No letters had been received for him. He had sent no orders relative to the forwarding of any. Having delivered his message so far, Jim Swain hesitated. Harriet understood the reticence, and spared a momentary thought for passing wonderment at this little touch of delicacy in so unpromising a subject for the exhibition of the finer emotions.

"Did the person who answered you ask you any question?" she said.

"No, mum," said Jim, relieved. Harriet said no more, she knew he had not made the false statement which had proved to

be needless, and something assured her that there was no necessity that she should caution Jim to say nothing concerning this commission. Now she went away in reality—went home. She ascended the stairs to her room, and looked at her face in a glass as she took her bonnet off, and thought, “I wonder if people can see in my face that I am turning into a coward, and am going mad? I could not knock at that door and ask that simple, natural question for myself—I *could not*: and a little while ago, *since*—ay, *long since*—I could have done anything. But not now—not now. When the time comes, when the waiting is over, when the suspense is ended, then I may be strong again, if indeed I am not quite mad by then; but now—now I cannot do anything—I cannot even *wait*.”

The fixed look had left her face, and was succeeded by a painful wildness, and an expression almost like that of some present physical terror. She pressed her hands upon her temples and rocked herself to and fro, but there was no wild abandonment of grief in the gesture. Presently she began to moan, but all unconsciously; for catching the sound after a little, she checked it angrily. Then she took up some needlework, but it dropped from her hands after a few minutes. She started up, and said, quite aloud, “It’s no use—it’s no use; I *must* have rest!” Then she unlocked her dressing-case, took out a bottle of laudanum, poured some of the contents into a glass of water, drank the mixture, and lay down upon her bed. She was soon in a deep sleep which seemed peaceful and full of rest. It was undisturbed. A servant came into the room, but did not arouse her, and it was understood in the house that “master” would probably not return to dinner.

Mr James Swain turned his steps in the direction of the delectable region in which his home was situated. He was in so far more fortunate than many of his class that he had a home, though a wretched one. It consisted of a dingy little room at the back of the third story in a rickety house in Strutton-ground, and was shared with a decrepit female, the elder sister of the boy’s dead mother, who earned a frightfully insufficient subsistence by shoe-binding. More precarious than ever was this fragile means of living now, for her sight was failing, as her strength had failed.

But things had been looking up with Jim of late, odd jobs had been plenty, his services had reached in certain quarters the status of recognized facts, and the street-boy was kind to his old relative. They were queer people, but not altogether uninteresting, and, strange to say, by no means unhappy. Old Sally had never been taught anything herself but shoe-binding, or she would have imparted instruction to Jim. Now Jim had learned to read in his mother's lifetime, and before his father had "come to grief" and been no more heard of, and it was consequently he who imparted instruction to his aunt. She was as fond of penny romances as the boy himself, and was wonderfully quick at discovering the impenetrable mysteries and unwinding the labyrinthine webs of those amazing productions. So Jim, cheered by the prospect of a lucrative job for the morrow, purchased a fresh and intensely horrible pennyworth by the way, and devoted himself for the evening to the delectation of old Sally, who liked her murders, as she liked her tea and her snuff, strongly flavoured.

The pennyworth lasted a good while, for Jim read slowly and elaborately, and conversational digressions occurred frequently. The heroine of the story, a proud and peerless peeress, was peculiarly fascinating to the reader and the listener.

"Lor, Jim," said old Sally, when the last line had been spelled over, and Jim was reluctantly obliged to confess that that was "all on it"—"lor, Jim, to think of that sweet pretty creetur, Rorer,"—the angelic victim of the story was known to mortals as Aurora,—"*knowing as how her ladyship 'ad been and done it all, and dyin' all alone in the moonshine, along o' thinkin' on her mother's villany.*"

Ordinarily, when Jim Swain lay down on his flock bed in the corner, he went to sleep with enviable rapidity; but the old woman's words had touched some chord of association or wonder in his clumsily arranged but not unintelligent mind; so that long after old Sally, in her corner of her little room, was sound asleep, Jim sat up hastily, ran his hands through his tangled hair, and said aloud:

"Good Lord! that's it! *She's sure she knows it, she knows*

he did it, and she hidin' on it, and kiverin' of it up, and it's killing her."

The stipulated hour in the morning beheld Jim Swain engaged in the task of window-cleaning, not very unpleasant in such weather. He pursued his occupation with unusual seriousness; the impression of the previous night remained upon him.

The back parlour, called, of course, the "study" in Routh's house, deserved the name as much or as little as such rooms ordinarily merit it. The master of the house, at least, used the room habitually, reading there a little, and writing a great deal. He had been sitting before a bureau, which occupied a space to the right of the only window in the apartment, for some time, when Harriet came to ask him if the boy, who was cleaning the windows, might go on with that one.

"Certainly," said Routh, absently; "he won't disturb me."

It would have required something of more importance than the presence of a boy on the other side of the window to disturb Routh. He was arranging papers with the utmost intentness. The drawers of the bureau were open on either side, the turned-down desk was covered with papers, some tied up in packets, others open: a large sheet, on which lines of figures were traced, lay on the blotting-pad. The dark expression most familiar to it was upon Stewart Routh's face that morning, and the tightly compressed lips never unclosed for a moment as he pursued his task. Jim Swain, on the outside of the window, which was defended by a narrow balcony and railing, could see him distinctly, and looked at him with much eagerness while he polished the panes. It was a fixed belief with Jim that Routh was always "up to" something, and the boy was apt to discover confirmation in the simplest actions of his patron. Had another observer of Routh's demeanour been present, he might, probably, have shared Jim's impression; for the man's manner was intensely pre-occupied. He read and wrote, sorted papers, tied them up, and put them away, with unremitting industry.

Presently he stretched his hand up to a small drawer in the upper compartment of the bureau; but, instead of taking a paper

or a packet from it, he took down the drawer itself, placed it on the desk before him, and began to turn over its contents with a still more darkly frowning face. Jim, at the corner of the window furthest from him, watched him so closely that he suspended the process of polishing; but Routh did not notice the cessation. Presently he came upon the papers which he had looked for, and was putting them into the breast-pocket of his coat, when he struck the drawer with his elbow, and knocked it off the desk. It fell on the floor, and its contents were scattered over the carpet. Among them was an object which rolled away into the window, and immediately caught the attention of Jim Swain. The boy looked at it, through the glass, with eyes in which amazement and fear contended. Routh picked up the contents of the drawer, all but this one object, and looked impatiently about in search of it. Then Jim, desperately anxious to see this thing nearer, took a resolution. He tapped at the window, and signed to Routh to open it and let him in. Routh, surprised, did so.

"Here it is, sir," said Jim, not entering the room, but sprawling over the window-sill, and groping with his long hands along the border of a rug which sheltered the object of Routh's search from his observation—"here it is, sir. I see it when it fell, and I knowed you couldn't see it from where you was."

The boy looked greedily at the object in his hand, and rolled it about once or twice before he handed it to Routh, who took it from him with a careless "Thank you." His preoccupied manner was still upon him. Then Jim shut down the window again from the outside and resumed his polishing. Routh replaced the drawer. Jim tried very hard to see where he placed the object he had held for a moment in his hand, but he could not succeed. Then Routh locked the bureau, and, opening a door of communication with the dining-room, Jim caught a momentary sight of Harriet sitting at the table, and went to his breakfast.

The seriousness of the previous night had grown and deepened over the boy. Abandoning the pursuit of odd jobs precisely at the hour of the day when he usually found them most plentiful, Jim took his way homewards with headlong speed. Arrived within sight of the wretched houses, he paused. He did not wish

any one to see what he was going to do. Fortune favoured him. As he stood irresolute at one end of the narrow street, his aunt came out of the door. She was going, he knew, to do her humble shopping, which consisted, for the most part, in haggling with costermongers by the side of their carts, and cheapening poor vegetables at the stalls. She would not be coming back just yet. He waited until she had turned the opposite corner, and then plunged into the open doorway and up the dark staircase. Arrived at the room which formed his sole habitation, Jim shut the door, and unceremoniously pulled away his flock bed, rolled up neatly enough in a corner, from the wall. This wall was covered with a paper once gaudy, now dreary with the utter dreariness of dirt charged on bright colour, and had a wooden surbase about a foot in depth. Above the surbase there was a hole, not so large as to be easily remarked in a place where dilapidation of every sort was the usual state of things, and in this hole Jim insinuated his hand. There was suggestive dexterity in the way he did this; the lithe fingers had suppleness and readiness, swiftness and accuracy of touch, which, if there had been any one to care for the boy, that one would doubtless have noticed with regret. If he were not already a thief, Jim Swain possessed some of the physical requisites for that profession. Presently he withdrew the lithe hand, and looked steadfastly at the object which it had extracted from the hole in the wall. He turned it over and over, he examined it within and without, then he put it back again in the hiding-place, and replaced his bed.

Old Sally was much surprised, when she returned from her "marketing," to find her nephew at home. The apparition of Jim in the daytime, except on stray occasions, when, fortune being unpropitious, he would come home to see what his aunt could do for him in the way of dinner, was exceedingly rare. But he explained it now by saying he was tired, and had been well paid for a job he had done that morning. He proposed that he should get something choice that day for dinner, and stay "in" until evening.

"There's a new play at the 'Delphi to-night," said Jim, "and there'll be plenty of jobs down that way, callin' cabs and helpin'

visitors to the hupper circles, as can't afford 'em, across the street. They're awful bewildered, mostly, when they come out of the theayter, and dreadful timid of the 'busses."

Very silent, and apparently sleepy, was Mr James Swain all day ; and as his old aunt sat patiently toiling by the window, he lay upon his bed with his knees up, and his hands crossed on the top of his tousled head. Allowing for the difference created by refinement, education, and the habit of thinking on a system, only possible to the educated, there was some resemblance in the expression of the boy's face to that which Harriet Routh's had worn yesterday, when she had carried the burden of her thoughts, under the clear sky and the sunshine, in the Green Park. Jim Swain, too, looked as if he alone, unaided as she, was thinking it out.

The new play at the Adelphi was very successful. The theatre was crowded ; the autumnal venture had turned out admirably ; and though the audience could not be called fashionable, it was perhaps rather more animated and satisfactory in consequence. Jim Swain's most sanguine hopes were realized. The night was fine ; people did not mind waiting a few minutes ; good humour and threepenny-pieces were abundant. A tolerable sprinkling of private carriages relieved the plebeian plenitude of cabs, and these vehicles were called up with an energy to which, in the season, human nature would hardly have been equal. Jim was extremely active in summoning them, and had just returned breathless to the portico of the theatre to catch another name, and rush away again to proclaim it to the listening flunkies, when he was arrested by the sight of a gentleman whose face he knew, who was standing under the garish light of the entry with a lady, whose hand rested on his arm, and whose face was turned upward towards him, so that the full glare of the light fell upon it. Her tall figure, the splendour of her dress, the careless grace of her attitude, the appearance of unconsciousness of the general observation she was attracting, even in that self-engrossed crowd—pardonably self-engrossed, considering that it was occupied with the care of getting home as soon as possible—would have made her a suffi-

ciently remarkable object to attract Jim's attention ; but there was more than perception of all these things in the look which he fixed upon her. He stood still, a little in the shade. Routh did not see him. The lady was looking at him, and he saw nothing but her face—nothing but the brilliant dark eyes, so bright for all the world, so soft for only him ; nothing but the crimson lips, which trembled ; the rose-tinted cheek, which paled only at his words—only under his glance.

Her carriage was called. She walked towards it with her dress sweeping round her, and the other people fell back, and let her pass, naturally, and not by the urgency of the dingy officials who brawl and fight on such occasions. When she had taken her seat in the carriage, Routh followed her, and then Jim started forward. There was no footman, so the man with the badge and the lantern, well known and prized of unprotected females with a taste for theatre-going, asked, "Where to?" Jim, quite close, and totally unobserved, listened eagerly. The lady's voice replied, "Home."

"Home," said the man with the lantern, and instantly turned his attention to the next departures. Jim Swain glanced at the carriage ; it had no rumble, only a footboard. As it drove off slowly, for the Strand was crowded, he dashed into the jumble of cabs and omnibuses and followed it, running desperately, but dexterously too, and succeeded in keeping up with it until, at a point of comparative obscurity, he clambered up on the footboard.

The carriage rolled westward, and carried Jim Swain with it until it reached one of the small so-called squares which are situated between Brompton proper and Chelsea. Then it stopped before a house with a heavy stone portico and a heavy stone balcony. Jim slid lightly to the ground, and hid himself in the shelter of the heavy stone portico of the adjoining house. Routh got out of the carriage ; and when the house-door was opened, and a flood of light issued from it, he handed out the lady. She stood breathing the sweet air a moment, and the light once more touched her face and her dress with a rich radiance.

"It's her," said Jim. "It's her—*her* and *him*."

"What a lovely night!" said Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, and

then the door closed on her and Routh, and Jim stood still in his hiding-place until the carriage had slowly departed to the adjacent mews. Then he emerged from the portico, went up the steps of the house the lady and her companion had entered, and looked at the number on the door, distinctly visible by the light of the gas-jet within.

"Number four," said Jim; "now for the name of the square;" and he crossed the road, skirted the railings of the enclosed patch of brown ground and stunted shrubs, and took the opposite side of the way. The night was clear and bright, and the name of the square was distinctly legible.

"Hollington-square," said Jim. "They called Mrs Bembridge's carriage. I have not a bad head for names, but I'll get Teddy Smith to write these down. And I can't stand it any longer; I must do something. I'll try and get Mr Dallas to let me speak to him when he comes from abroad, and then I'll tell him all about it. I suppose," said Jim very ruefully, "if he thinks right to tell, they'll lag me; but it can't be helped. Almost every one as I've knowed gets lagged some time or other."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FALLING OF THE SWORD.

STEWART ROUTH left his house in Mayfair at an early hour on the day following that which had witnessed the eccentric proceedings and subsequent resolution of Jim Swain. Things were prospering with him; and the vague dread which had fallen on him had been dissipated. Hope and defiance divided his mind between them. His speculations were all doing well; there was money to be had—money easy to be realized, on which he could lay his hand at very short notice, and there was triumphant successful love. So much had hope to feed on—assuredly no insufficient aliment. Defiance reared itself against Fate. The time was

drawing near, approaching with fearfully rapid strides, when the contingency, long contemplated, successfully eluded for a period beyond his expectation, kept off by such unlikely accidents and combinations as might almost have justified his daring faith in his luck, but recognized of late as inevitable, must be realized, when the identity of the murdered man must be known, and the perilous investigation must begin. So be it, he was ready to meet the danger if it must be met ; but he hoped no such necessity would arise. His influence over the beautiful woman whom he now really loved with all the passion he had at first feigned was becoming every day stronger and more complete. He knew that the strength of his nature had subdued her ; she had no pride, she had only vanity ; and Stewart Routh made the mistake to which selfish and interested natures are prone. He forgot to calculate upon the influence of selfishness and calculation when their employ must necessarily be in opposition to him. His egotism injured the balance of his intellect, and now he had not the aid of Harriet's calm, cool, unerring judgment in his scheme to restore that balance. His position with regard to Harriet was the most troublesome topic of his thoughts just now. He tried to forget it often, but he did not succeed ; not that any sentimental obstacle to the most complete oblivion presented itself. Routh never bestowed a backward glance upon the life of self-sacrifice and devotion to him, of fidelity which, however depraved in its manifestations, was still fidelity, fond and true as the best man who ever lived an honest and virtuous life in the face of heaven and earth might be proud to inspire, which had been that of the woman whom he had deliberately betrayed, and was now prepared deliberately to abandon. He would have sneered at such a suggestion as a contemptible weakness. Harriet had been undeniably useful to him. He did not attempt to deny the fact to himself ; but circumstances had arisen which prevented his making use of her in the future, and consequently, as this instrument was unfortunately living, intelligent, peculiarly acute, and animated by one of the strongest of human passions, had become dangerous. Harriet had been agreeable to him too—it has been said that he had loved her after his fashion ; but this had been all over months ago ; and the

deadeast of all mortal things, to a man of Stewart Routh's stamp, is a dead love; it has not even the dreary faculty of ghostliness—it cannot haunt. The uncomplaining, active, hard-working, inventive, untiring comrade, the passionately loving wife, the shrewd, unscrupulous, undaunted, steel-nerved colleague, was nothing more to him now than a dangerously sharp-witted, suspicious woman, who knew a great deal too much about him, and was desperately in his way. The exhilaration of his spirits and the partial intoxication of his new passion had done away with the fear of Harriet which had taken possession of him, but they had intensified his dislike, and one thought presented itself with peculiar distinctness to Stewart Routh as he went City-wards that morning. It was:

“If it was only to get out of her sight, to be rid of her for ever, what a relief it would be!”

He had been at some pains to keep up appearance with his wife since their return to London. To the step which he meditated a quarrel with her was in no way necessary; and in the event of his failing to bring his plans to maturity before the inevitable discovery, it was all important that they should be agreed on the line of action to be taken. Harriet could not, indeed, oppose him successfully in his determination, if the occasion should arise, to throw the charge of the murder upon George Dallas; but she might render his position extremely perilous if she did not second him. What reason had he to fear? The estrangement between them had been growing wider, it was true, but it had not been exclusively of his making; she had held aloof from him as much as he from her, and he acknowledged that, if no infidelity had existed upon his part, it would still have taken place. From the moment they ceased to be comrades in expedients, and became accomplices in crime, the consequences made themselves felt. Routh did not believe in blessings or in curses, but he did not dispute the inevitable result of two persons finding out the full extent of each other's wickedness—that those two persons, if obliged to live together, will find it rather uncomfortable. The worst accomplice a man can have is his wife, he had often thought; women always have some scruple lurking somewhere about them, a hankering after the ideal, for the possibility of respecting a man

in some degree. When he had been forced to see and to believe in the intensity of his wife's silent sufferings, it had occurred to him more than once to think, "she would not be so miserable if she had done it herself; she would have been much jollier. Nothing ever will cure some women of sentiment."

Did it ever occur to him that it had not been worth his while to do what he had done? that, on the whole, it had not paid? No, never. Routh had been angry with Harriet when the matter had been brought up between them, had complained that it was always "cropping up;" but the truth was, he thought of it himself much more frequently than it was impressed on him by any allusion from without; and he never ceased to remind himself that the deed had been necessary, indispensable. It had brought him money when money must have been had, or all must have ended for him; it had brought him money when money meant a clearing and brightening of his sky, an utter change in his life, the cessation of a hazardous and ignoble warfare, the restoration to a peaceful and comparatively safe career. He was in a difficult position now, it was true—a position in which there was peril to be surmounted only by dauntlessness, prudence, and coolness; but he was dauntless, prudent, and cool. Had all this never been, what might have been his position? When Deane and he had met, his luck had been almost at its lowest; and, in the comradeship which had ensued, there had always been burning anger and intense humiliation on Routh's part, and cool, sneering, heartless boasting on Deane's. Routh was the cleverer man of the two, and incomparably the greater villain; but Deane had elements of rascality in him which even Routh had felt himself entitled to despise. And he had hated him. Routh, in his cool manner of thinking things over, had not failed to take this feeling into due account. He would not have killed Deane only because he hated him; he was too true to his principles to incur so tremendous a risk for the simple gratification of even the worst sentiment, of even sentiment intensified into a passion, but he allowed it sufficient weight and influence effectually to bar the entrance of a regret when the larger object had also been attained. He had no pity for his victim, not even the physical sensation which is experienced by men whose

organization and associations are not of the brutal kind, when temper, circumstances, or sudden temptation have impelled them to deeds of cruelty; he had hated Deane too much for that. He never thought of the crime he had committed without dwelling on the conduct which had made him resolve upon it. How the man had played with his necessities, had tricked him with compromising confidences, had duped him with false promises, had led him to the very brink of the abyss, and there had struggled with him—with him, a desperate man! Fool—fool! one must go over the brink, then; and who should it but be the weaker? who should hold his ground but the stronger—but he who had everything to gain? He thought over all these things again to-day, methodically, arranging the circumstances as they had occurred in his mind. He recalled the hours of suspense through which he had lived on that day when Deane had promised to bring him a sum of money, representing his own interest in the mining company, which sum was to secure to Routh the position he had striven hard to attain, and rescue him from the consequences of a fraudulent transfer of shares which he had already effected. It had come to a question of hours, and the impatience and suspense had almost worn out Routh's strong nerves, almost deprived him of his self-command. How well he remembered it; how he lived through all that time again! It had never been so vivid in his remembrance, with all the vitality of hate and anger, often as he had thought of it, as it was to-day.

The heartless trifling, the petty insolence of the rich rascal, who little guessed the strength and resolution, the daring and desperation, of the greater, if worse, villain, came back as freshly to Stewart Routh's vindictive memory as if he had not had his ghastly revenge and his miserable triumph months ago, as if he had suffered and winced under them but yesterday. And that yesterday! What a glorious day in his life it had been! Presently he would think about that, and nothing but that; but now he must pursue his task of memory to the end. For he was not his own master in this. Once set to thinking of it, to living it all over again, he had no power to abridge the history.

He had to remember the hours during which he had waited for

Deane's coming, for the payment of the promised money ; he had to remember how they waned, and left him sick with disappointment, maddened with apprehension ; how he had determined he would keep the second appointment with Deane : he did not fear his failing in that, because it was for his own pleasure ; and then, for the first time in his life, had felt physically unable to endure suspense, to keep up appearances. He had to remember how he had shrunk from the coarse insolence with which he knew Deane would sport with his fears and his suspense in the presence of George Dallas, unconscious of their mutual position ; how all-important it was that, until he had wrung from Deane the promised money, he should keep his temper. He had to remember how the idea that the man who had so far broken faith with him already, and might break faith with him altogether, and so ruin him utterly (for if he had failed then, and been detected, hope would have been at an end for him), was within a few yards of him, perhaps with the promised money in his pocket, at that moment, had occurred to him with a strange fascination. How it had intensified his hatred of Deane ; how it had deepened his sense of his own degradation ; how it had made him rebel against and curse his own poverty, and filled his heart with malediction on the rich man who owned that money which meant safety and success to him. He had to remember how Deane had given no answer to his note, temperately worded and reasonable (Harriet had kept to the letter of the truth in what she had said of it to George Dallas), but had left him to all the tortures of suspense. He had to remember how the desire to know whether Deane really had had all day in his possession the money he had promised him, and had kept him expecting, grew imperative, implacable, irresistible ; how he had hung about the tavern, and discovered by Deane's boasting words to his companion that he had guessed aright, had followed them, determined to have an answer from Deane. He had to remember how he strove with anger, with some remnants of his former pride, which tortured him with savage longings for revenge, while he waited about in the purlieus of the billiard-rooms whither Deane and Dallas had gone. He remembered how lonely and blank, how quiet and

dreary, the street had become by the time the two came out of the house together and parted, in his hearing, with some careless words. He had to remember how he confronted Deane, and was greeted with a taunt; how he had borne it; how the man had played with his suspense, and ostentatiously displayed the money which the other had vainly watched and waited for all day; and then, suddenly assuming an air of friendliness and confidence, had led him away Citywards, without betraying his place of residence, questioning him about George Dallas. He had to remember how this had embittered and intensified his anger, and how a sudden fear had sprung up in his mind that Deane had confided to Dallas the promises he had made to him, and the extent to which their "business" relations had gone. A dexterous question or two had relieved this apprehension, and then he had once more turned the conversation on the subject in which he was so vitally interested. He had to remember—and how vividly he did remember, with what an awakening of the savage fury it had called into life, how Deane had met this fresh attempt—with what a cool and tranquil assertion that he had changed his mind, had no further intention of doing any business in Routh's line—was going out of town, indeed, on the morrow, to visit some relations in the country, too long neglected, and had no notion when they should meet again.

And then—then Stewart Routh had to remember how he had killed the man who had taunted, deceived, treated him cruelly; how he had killed him, and robbed him, and gone home and told his wife—his comrade, his colleague, his dauntless, unscrupulous Harriet. He had to remember more than all this, and he hated to remember it. But the obligation was upon him; he could not forget how she had acted, after the first agony had passed over, the first penalty inflicted by her physical weakness, which she had spurned and striven against. So surely as his memory was forced to reproduce all that had gone before, it was condemned to revive all that had come after. But he did not soften towards her that day, no, not in the least, though never had his recollection been so detailed, so minute, so calm. No, he hated her. She wearied him; she had ceased to be of any service to him; she was a con-

stant torment to him. So he came back to the idea with which his reflections had commenced, and, as he entered on the perusal of the mass of papers which awaited his attention in his "chambers" in Tokenhouse-yard—for he shared the business-abode of the invisible Flinders now—he repeated :

"What a relief it would be to get away from her for ever!"

Only a few days now, and the end must come. He was a brave man in his evil way, and he made his calculations coolly, and scanned his criminal combinations without any foolish excess of confidence, but with well-grounded expectation. For a little longer it would not be difficult to keep on fair terms with Harriet, especially as she had renewed her solitary mode of life, and he had taken the precaution of pretending to a revived devotion to play, since the auspicious occasion on which he had won so largely at Homburg. Thus his absence from home was accounted for; and as she had not the slightest suspicion that Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge was in London, had never displayed the least jealousy, except on the one occasion when he had shown her the locket, and had unhesitatingly accepted his explanation of their sudden return to England, he had no reason to trouble himself about her. To sedulously avoid exciting her suspicion and jealousy now, and when the proper time should arrive, to confirm the one and arouse the other so effectually by desertion, infidelity, and insult, as to drive her at once to free herself from him by the aid of the law—this was his scheme. It looked well; he knew Harriet, he thought, thoroughly, and he might safely calculate upon the course she would adopt. It was strange, if human inconsistency can ever be strange, that Stewart Routh, a man of eminently vindictive disposition, entirely forgot to take into account that the woman thus desperately injured might also seek her revenge, which would consist in declining to take her own freedom at the price of giving him his.

Perhaps if the depths of that dark heart had been sounded, the depths beyond its own consciousness—the unvisited, unquestioned, profound—it would have been discovered that this man was so entirely accustomed to the devotion of the woman who loved him

with a desperate though intelligent love, that even in her utmost despair and extreme outrage of wrong he felt assured she would do that which it was his will she should do.

During all this mental review he had hardly bestowed a thought on George Dallas. He would be safe enough in the end, if the worst came to the worst. It had suited him to magnify the strength of the chain of coincidences, which looked like evidence, in discussing them with George, and he had magnified it; it suited him to diminish that strength in discussing them with himself, and he diminished it. A good deal of suffering and disgrace to all the "Felton-Dallas-Carruthers connection," as he insolently phrased it in his thoughts, must come to pass, of course, but no real danger. And if it were not so? Well, in that case, he really could not afford to care. When he had wanted money, Deane (he still thought of him by that name) had had to give way to that imperative need. Now he wanted safety, and Dallas must pay its price. There was something of the sublime of evil in this man's sovereign egotism. As he turned his mind away from the path it had been forced to tread to the end, he thought, "there is a touch of the whimsical in everything; in this it is the demi-semi-relationship between Harriet and these people. I suppose the sensitive lady of Poynings never heard of her step-father Creswick's niece."

A letter for Mr Routh, a delicate, refined-looking letter, sealed with the daintiest of monograms, the thick board-like envelope containing a sheet of paper to match, on which only a few lines are scrawled. But as Stewart Routh reads them, his sinister dark eyes gleam with pleasure and triumph, and his handsome evil face is deeply flushed.

"Bearer waits." Mr Routh writes an answer to the letter, short but ardent, if any one had now been there to judge by the expression of his face while he was writing it. He calls his clerk, who takes the letter to "bearer;" but that individual has been profiting by the interval to try the beer in a closely adjacent beer-shop, and the letter is laid upon a table in the passage leading to Stewart Routh's rooms, to await his return from the interesting investigation.

Another letter for Mr Routh, and this time also "bearer waits." Waits, too, in the passage, and sees the letter lying on the table, and has plenty of time to read the address before the experimenting commissioner returns, has it handed to him, and trudges off with it.

Presently the door at the end of the passage opens, and Routh comes out. "Who brought me a letter just now?" he says to the clerk, and then stops short, and turns to "bearer."

"O, it's you, Jim, is it? Take this to Mrs Routh."

Then Stewart Routh went back to his room, and read again the note to which he had just replied. It was from Harriet, and contained only these words:

"Come home at the first possible moment. A letter from G. D., detained by accident for two days, has just come, and is of the utmost importance. *Let nothing detain you.*"

The joy and triumph in his face had given way to fury; he muttered angry oaths as he tore the note up viciously.

"All the more reason if the worst has come—or is nearer than we thought—that I should strike the decisive blow to-day. She has all but made up her mind—she must make it quite up to-day. This is Tuesday; the Asia sails on Saturday. A letter from Dallas only cannot bring about the final crash: nothing can really happen till he is here. If I have only ordinary luck, we shall be out of harm's way by then."

A little later Stewart Routh made certain changes in his dress, very carefully, and departed from Tokenhouse-yard in a hansom, looking as unlike a man with any cares, business or other kind, upon his mind as any gentleman in all London. "Queen's-gate, Kensington," he said to the driver; and the last words of the letter, daintily sealed, and written on board-like paper, which was in his breast-pocket at that moment, were:

"I will wait for you in the carriage at Queen's-gate."

"I'm glad I see'd that 'ere letter," said Jim Swain to himself, as, deeply preoccupied by the circumstances of the preceding day, he faced towards Routh's house, "because when I put Mr Dallas on this here lay, I needn't let out as I spied 'em home. I can 'count for knowin' on the place permiskus." And then, from an

intricate recess of his dirty pocket, much complicated with crumbs and fragments of tobacco, Jim pulled out a crumpled scrap of paper. "Teddy wrote it down quite right," he said, and he smoothed out the paper, and transferred it, for safer keeping, to his cap, in which he had deposited the missive with which he was charged.

When Jim Swain arrived at his destination, and the door was opened to him, Harriet was in the hall. She seemed surprised that he had brought her a written answer. She had expected merely a verbal reply, telling her how soon Routh would be home. Jim pulled his cap off hastily, taken by surprise at seeing her, and while he handed her the note, looked at her with a full renewal of all the compassion for her which had formerly filled his untaught but not untender heart. He guessed rightly that he had brought her something that would pain her. She looked afraid of the note during the moment she held it unopened in her hand; but she did not think only of herself, she did not forget to be kind to him.

"Go down to the kitchen, and cook will give you some dinner, Jim," she said, as she went into the dining-room and shut the door; and the boy obeyed her with an additional sense of hatred and suspicion against Routh at his heart.

"I'm beginning to make it all out now," he thought, as he disposed of his dinner in most unusual silence. "The other one put Routh up to it all, out of spite of some kind. It was a plant of *hers*, it was; and this here good 'un—for she *is* good—is a-sufferin' for it all, while he's a carryin' on." Shortly after Jim Swain took a rueful leave of the friendly cook, and departed by the area-gate. Having reached Piccadilly, he stood still for a moment, pondering, and then took a resolution, in pursuance of which he approached the house at which he had made a similar inquiry the day before, and again asked if there was any news of Mr Felton. "Yes," the servant replied; "a telegram had been received from Paris. The rooms were to be ready on the following day. Mr Felton and Mr Dallas were coming by the tidal train."

"I've a mind to go back and tell her," said Jim to himself. "She must want to know for some particular reason, or she

wouldn't have sent me to ask yesterday, and she wouldn't have let me catch her out in tellin' a crammer if there warn't somethin' in it. But no," said Jim sagely, "I won't. I'll wait for Mr Dallas; there ain't long to wait now."

Jim Swain's resolution had an important consequence, which came about in a very ordinary and trifling way. If the boy had gone back to Routh's house, and had been admitted into the hall, he would have seen a piece of paper lying on the door-mat, on which his quick eyes would instantly have recognized the calligraphic feat of his accomplished friend, Teddy Smith; and he would have regained possession of it. But Jim did not return, and the paper lay there undisturbed for some hours—lay there, indeed, until it was seen by the irreproachable Harris when he went to light the gas, picked up, perused by him, and taken to his mistress, who was sitting in the drawing-room quite unoccupied. She looked up as the servant entered; and when the room was lighted, he saw that she was deadly pale, but took no notice of the paper which he placed on the table beside her. Some time after he had left the room her glance fell upon it, and she stretched out her hand wearily, and took it up, with a vague notion that it was a tax-gatherer's notice. But Harriet Routh, whose nerves had once been proof against horror, dread, suffering, danger, or surprise, started as if she had been shot when she saw, written upon the paper: "Mrs Bembridge, 4 Hollington-square, Brompton."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"CRUEL AS THE GRAVE."

"I do not know what he is doing," Harriet had repeated to herself in sore distress; "I do not know what he is doing. I am in the dark, and the tide is rising."

The jealous agony she had suffered at Homburg was harder to bear than the uncertainty which had been her lot since her return.

The intense passion of jealousy sprung up within her was a revelation to this woman of the violence of her nature, over which a stern restraint had been kept so long that quiet and calm had grown habitual to her while nothing troubled or disputed her love ; but they deserted her at the first rude touch laid upon the sole treasure, the joy, the punishment, the occupation, mainspring, and meaning of her life. Under all the quiet of her manner, under all the smoothness of her speech, Harriet Routh knew well there was a savage element in the desperation of her love for Routh, since he had committed the crime which sets a man apart from his fellows, marked with the brand of blood. She had loved him in spite of the principles of her education, in defiance of the stings of her conscience, dead now, but which had died hard ; but now she loved him in spite of the promptings of her instincts, in spite of the revulsion of her womanly feelings, in defiance of the revolt of her senses and her nerves. The more utterly lost he was the more she clung to him, not indeed in appearance, for her manner had lost its old softness, and her voice the tone which had been a caress ; but in her torn and tortured heart. With desperate and mad obstinacy she loved him, defied fate, and hated the world which had been hard to him, for his sake.

With the first pang of jealousy awoke the fierceness of this love, awoke the proud and defiant assertion of her love and her ownership in her breast. Never would Harriet have pleaded her true, if perverted, love, her unwavering, if wicked, fidelity, to the man who was drifting away from her ; the woman's lost soul was too generous for that ; but he was hers, her own ;—purchased ;—God, in whom she did not believe, and the devil, whom she did not fear, alone knew at what price ;—and he should not be taken from her by another, by one who had done nothing for him, suffered nothing for him, lost nothing for him. Her combativeness and her craft had been called into instant action by the first discovery of the unexpected peril in which her sole treasure was placed. She understood her position perfectly. No woman could have known more distinctly than Harriet how complete is the helplessness of a wife when her husband's love is straying from her, beckoned towards another—helplessness which every point of contrast

between her and her rival increases. She was quite incapable of the futile strife, the vulgar railing, which are the ordinary weapons of ordinary women in the unequal combat; she would have disdained their employment; but fate had furnished her with weapons of other form and far different effectiveness, and these she would use. Routh had strong common-sense, intense selfishness, and shrewd judgment. An appeal to these, she thought, could not fail. Nevertheless, they *had* failed, and Harriet was bewildered by their failure. When she made her first appeal to Routh, she was wholly unprepared for his refusal. The danger was so tremendous, the unforeseen discovery of the murdered man's identity had introduced into their position a complication so momentous, so insurmountable, that she had never dreamed for a moment of Routh's being insensible to its weight and emergency. But he rejected her appeal—rudely, brutally, almost, and her astonishment was hardly inferior to her anguish. He must indeed be infatuated by this strange and beautiful woman (Harriet fully admitted the American's beauty—there was an element of candour and judgment in her which made the littleness of depreciating a rival impossible) when he could overlook or under-estimate the importance, the danger, of this newly-arisen complication.

This was a new phase in her husband's character; this was an aspect under which she had never seen him, and she was bewildered by it, for a little. It had occurred to her once, on the day when she last saw George Dallas—parting with him at the gate of his mother's house—to think whether, had she had any other resource but her husband, had the whole world outside of him not been a dead blank to her, she could have let him go. She had heard of such things; she knew they happened; she knew that many women in "the world" took their husbands' infidelity quietly, if not kindly, and let them go, turning them to the resources of wealth and pleasure. She had no such resources, nor could these have appeased her for a moment if she had had. She cared nothing for liberty, she who had worn the chain of the most abject slavery, that of engrossing passionate love for an unworthy object, willingly, had hugged it to her bosom, had allowed it, without an effort to alleviate the pain, to eat into her flesh, and

fill it with corruption. But, more than this, she could not let him go, for his own sake ; she was true to the law of her life, that "honour rooted in dishonour" knew no tarnishing from her ; she must save him, for his own sake—from himself, she must save him, though not to bring him back to her—must save him, in spite of himself, though she longed, in the cruel pangs of her woman's anguish, to have done with it—to have found that nothingness in which she had come to believe as the "end all," and had learned to look to as her sovereign good.

She had reached such a conclusion, in her meditations, on the night of the great storm at Homburg ; she had determined on a course to be adopted for Routh's sake. She would discard fear, and show him that he must relinquish the desperate game he was playing. She would prove to him that fate had been too strong for him ; that in Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge the fatality which was destined to destroy him existed ; that her acquaintance with Arthur Felton, and her knowledge of Arthur Felton's affairs, into whose extent Routh had no possible pretext for inquiry, must necessarily establish the missing link. She would hide from him her own sufferings ; she would keep down her jealousy and her love ; she would appeal to him for himself ; she would plead with him only his own danger, only the tremendous risk he was involving himself in. Then she *must* succeed ; then the double agony of jealousy of him and fear for him in which she now lived must subside, the burning torment must be stilled. The time might perhaps come in which she should so far conquer self as to be thankful that such suffering had brought about his safety, for there could be no real security for them in London, the terrible fact of Deane's identity with Arthur Felton once known. After that discovery, no arguments could avail with George ; the strength of all those which she had used would become potent against her, their weight would be against her—that weight which she had so skilfully adjusted in the balance. After all, she thought that night, as she sat in the darkness and idly watched the lightning, hearing the raging wind unmoved, what would a little more misery matter to her ? Little, indeed, if it brought him safety ; and it should, it must !

From this condition of mind she had been roused by Routh's startling announcement of their departure on the morrow. The effect produced upon Harriet was strange. She did not believe that Routh had been only to the gaming-rooms that night: she felt an immutable conviction that he had seen Mrs Bembridge, and she instantly concluded that he had received a rebuff from the beautiful American. Inexpressibly relieved—though not blind enough to be in the least insensible to the infamy of her husband's faithlessness, and quite aware that she had more, rather than less, to complain of than she had previously believed;—for she rightly judged, this woman is too finished a coquette to throw up her game a moment before her own interest and safety absolutely obliged her to do so—she acquiesced immediately.

Had Stewart Routh had the least suspicion of the extent of his wife's knowledge of his life at Homburg, he could not have been lulled into the false security in which he indulged on his return to London. He perceived, indeed, that Harriet closely noted the state of his spirits, and silently observed his actions. But he was used to that. Harriet had no one to think of but him, had nothing to care about but him; and she had always watched him. Pleasantly, gaily, before;—coldly, grimly, now; but it was all the same thing. He was quite right in believing she had not the least suspicion that Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge was in London, but that was the sole point on which he was correct. Had he known how much his wife knew, he would have affected a dejection of spirits he was far from feeling, and would have disarmed her by greater attention to her during the few hours of each day which he passed at home.

Harriet was at a loss to account for his cheerfulness; but strong of mind and heart as she was, she was not altogether free from the weakness of catching at that interpretation of a mystery in which there was some relief for her own pain. So she concluded that he had been only passingly, and not deeply, hurt by the coquetry of the woman who had attracted him, and that he had recovered from the superficial wound, as soon as he became again immersed in the schemes which had awaited him in London.

He had told her little concerning these schemes, but she con-

sidered this reticence due to her own withdrawal from her former active participation in the business of his life, and it was an additional inducement to her to hope that Routh was taking the resolution which she desired. "When we get back to London I will think about it," he had said, and she clung to the hope, to the half-promise in the words. He was surely settling affairs so as to enable him to avoid the bursting of the storm. The tacit estrangement between them would account for his doing this silently; his vile temper, which Harriet thoroughly understood, and never failed to recognize in action, would account for his denying her the relief of knowing his intentions. Many small things in his daily life, which did not escape the quickened perception of his wife, betokened a state of preparation for some decided course of action. The time of explanation must necessarily come; meanwhile she watched, and waited, and suffered.

How she suffered in every hour of her life! Yet there was a kind of dulness over Harriet too. She recurred little to the past in point of feeling; she thought over it, indeed, in aid of the action of her reason and her will, but she did not recall it with the keenness either of acute grief for its vanished happiness, such as it had been, or of remorse and terror for its deep and desperate guilt. The burden of the day was enough now for this woman, whose strength had lasted so long, endured so much, and given way so suddenly.

But time was marching on, the inevitable end drawing near, and Harriet had been utterly unprepared for the second shock, the second unexpected event which had befallen. She had opened George Dallas's letter with the Paris postmark almost without an apprehension. The time for the thing she feared had not yet come; and here was a thing she had never feared, a possibility which had never presented itself to her imagination, brought at once fully before her. She had done this thing. One moment's want of caution, in the midst of a scene in which her nerves had been strung to their highest tension, and this had been the result. Had no other clue existed, these few lines of writing would furnish one leading unerringly to discovery. Supposing no other clue to exist, and Routh to pretend to inability to identify the writing,

there were several common acquaintances of Dallas and Deane who *could* identify it, and render a refusal the most dangerous step which Routh could take.

She sat for several minutes perfectly still, her face colourless as marble, and her blue eyes, fixed with a painful expression of terror, under the shock of this new discovery. She had had no worse apprehension than that the letter would announce the day of George's intended return, and for that she was prepared; but this! It was too much for her, and the first words she uttered showed that her mind had lost its strict faculty of reasoning; they broke from her with a groan:

"I—I it is who have destroyed him!"

But, even now, weakness and exaggeration had no long duration in Harriet Routh's mind. By degrees she saw this in its true light, an alarming, a terrible coincidence indeed, an addition to the danger of their position, but not necessarily a fatal catastrophe. Then she saw new light, she caught at a new idea, a fresh, bright hope. This would avail with Routh; this would drive away his irresolution; this would really inspire him with the true conviction of their danger; this, which would throw the whole burden of identification upon him; this, which would establish a strong and intimate link between him and the dead man; for the "articles to be purchased," named in the memorandum of which George had sent her a copy, were simply shares in companies with every one of which Stewart Routh was connected. Only George's ignorance of such matters had prevented his recognizing the meaning of the memorandum.

And now Harriet rose; and as she paced the room, the colour came back to her cheek, the light came back to her eyes. A new life and fresh energy seemed to spring up within her, and she grasped George's letter in her hand, and struck it against her bosom with an action of the hand and a responsive movement of the breast which was almost triumphant. This thing which she had done, which had looked like ruin, would be her way of escape.

Routh's refusal to return home immediately annoyed, puzzled, and disheartened her. Why was he so hard to move, so difficult

to convince, so insensible to danger? His plea was business; if this business was what she hoped and believed it to be, that of preparation, he should have come home to learn the new and urgent need for its expedition. Why was he so hard to her? Why had he no thought for her wishes, no compassion on her suspense? Harriet could not but ask herself that, though she strove against the deadly suffering the answer brought her.

Thus the time wore on drearily, until Harriet carelessly took from the table the slip of paper which contained a whole revelation for her.

Of the hours which succeeded she could not have given an account herself. How the fury of jealousy, of love betrayed, of faith violated, was reawakened within her, and inflamed to the wildest and most desperate pitch; how she writhed under the shame and the scorn which her husband's baseness forced her to feel. She had had profoundest pity, readiest help for the criminal; but for this pitiful, cowardly, cruel liar nothing but contempt—nothing! Ah, yes, something more, and that made it all the harder—contempt and love.

The woman was here, then—here, in London, on the spot to ruin him, lured hither by him. His false heart planned; his guilty hands dug the pit into which he was to fall; and now his feet were close upon the brink. This rendered him deaf and blind; for this he had basely deceived her, his best, his only friend; for this he had come to regard and treat her as his enemy; and now Harriet had to make a desperate effort indeed to rally all her strength and courage. She had to put the suffering aside, to let all her hopes go, to face a new and almost desperate condition of affairs, and to think how he was to be saved. It must be in spite of himself. This time, it must be in defiance of himself.

She had passed through a long period of suffering—if time is to be measured by pain—before Routh came home. She had not nearly thought it out; she had only reached a resolution to be patient and peaceful, and to conceal her knowledge of his treachery, if any effort could give her the strength to do so, when she heard

his key in the lock, and the next moment his hand on the door-handle.

There was confusion in the expression of Routh's shifty black eyes, some embarrassment in the tone of his voice. They were slight ; but she saw and understood them. Her heart gave one angry bound under the paper which lay securely in her bosom, but her steady face took no change from the pulsation.

"Sorry I couldn't get back. I got away as soon as I could," said Routh, as he threw aside his coat and put his hat down. Harriet pushed a chair towards him, and he sat down before she answered :

"I am sorry, too, Stewart. I can hardly think any business can have equalled in importance such an occurrence as this."

She put George Dallas's letter into his hand, and eagerly watched him, while with a face convulsed by anger, hatred, and all unholy passions, he read it.

If she could have seen his heart ! If she could have read the devilish project that filled it ! If she could have seen that in the discovery of the new and urgent danger he had seen, not blind to that danger indeed, but catching at the chance included in it, a means of realizing his atrocious plot against her ! If she could have distinguished, amid the surging, passionate thoughts and impulses which raged within him, this one, which each second made more clear :

"This is my opportunity. All is settled, all is right ; *she* and I are safe. I have triumphed, and this cursed letter gives me a better chance than any I could have formed or made. This infernal idiot is always my curse and my dupe ; however, he has done me a good turn this time."

If Harriet, watching the changes in her husband's countenance, could have read these thoughts, she might have interpreted aright the ferocity which blazed in his wicked eyes, while a cynical sneer curled his lip, as he flung the letter violently on the floor, starting up from his chair.

Harriet had seen Routh in a passion more than once, though only once had that passion been directed against herself, and she

was not a woman, even when its victim, to be frightened by a man's temper. But she was frightened now, really and truly frightened, not, however, by the violence of his rage, but because she did not believe in it. She did not understand his game; she saw he was playing one; why he feigned this fury she could not comprehend, but she knew it was feigned, and she was frightened. Against complicated deception of this kind she was powerless. She could not oppose successful art to the ingenious skill with which he was courting his own ruin, to save him. She could not disentangle this thought from the confusion in her brain; she felt only its first thrill of conviction, she only shrank from it with swift, sharp, physical pain, when Routh turned upon her with a torrent of angry and fierce reproaches.

"This is your doing," he said, the violence of his simulated anger hurrying his words, and rendering them almost unintelligible. "I owe it to you that this cursed fool has me in his power, if the idiot only finds it out, and knows how to use it, more securely than I ever had him in mine. This is your skill and your wisdom; your caution and your management, is it? Like a fool, I trusted a woman—you were always so sure of yourself, you know, and here's the result. You keep this pretty piece of conviction in your desk, and produce it just in the nick of time. I don't wonder you wanted me home; I don't wonder you were in such a hurry to give me such a proof of your boasted cleverness."

Her clear blue eyes were upon him; his restless black eyes shifted under her gaze, but could not escape it. She did not release him for an instant from that piercing look, which became, with each word he spoke, more and more alight with scorn and power. The steady look maddened him, the feigned passion changed to real rage, the man's evil face paled.

She slightly raised her hand, and pointed to the chair he had left; he kicked it savagely away. She spoke, her hands still extended. "Stewart, I do not understand you, but I am not taken in by you. What are you aiming at? Why are you pretending to this violent and unreasonable anger?"

"Pretending!" he exclaimed, with an oath; "it is no pretence,

as you shall find. Pretending! Woman, you have ruined me, and I say—"

"And I say," she interposed, as she slowly rose, and stood upright before him, her head raised, her steady eyes still mercilessly set on his, "this is a vain and ridiculous pretence. You cannot long conceal its motive from me: whatever game you are playing, I will find it out."

"Will you, by —?" he said, fiercely.

"I will, for your own sake," she answered calmly. And, standing before him, she touched him lightly on the breast with her small white hand. "Stop! don't speak. I say, for your own sake. You and I, Stewart, who were once one, are two now; but that makes no change in me. I don't reproach you."

"Oh, don't you?" he said. "I know better. There's been nothing but whining and reproaches lately."

"Now you are acting again, and again I tell you I will find out why. The day of reproach can never—shall never—come; the day of ruin is near, awfully near—"

"You've taken care of that."

"Again! You ought to know me better, Stewart; you can't lie to me undetected. In time I shall know the truth, now I discern the lie. But all this is vain. Read once more." She took up the letter, smoothed it out, and held it towards him. He struck it out of her hand, and cursed her.

She looked at him in blank amazement for a moment, and then said:

"You are not drunk again, Stewart? You are not mad? If you are not, listen to me, for your fate is rushing upon you. The time may be counted by hours. Never mind my share in this new event, never mind what you really think, or what you pretend to think about it. It makes my appeal to you strong, irresistible. This is no fit of woman's terror; this is no whim, no wish to induce you to desert your harvest-field, to turn your back upon the promise of the only kind of life you care to live. Here is a link in the evidence against you, if suspicion lights upon you (and it must), which is of incontestable strength. Here, in Arthur Felton's writing, is the memoranda of the shares which you bought

and paid for with Arthur Felton's money. Stewart, Stewart, are you blind and mad, indeed, that you stay here, that you let the precious time escape you, that you dally with your fate? Let us begone, I say; let us escape while we may. George Dallas is not our only foe, not our only danger—formidable, indeed; but remember, Stewart, Mr Felton comes to seek for his son; remember that we have to dread the man's father!"

The pleading in her voice was agonizing in its intensity, the lustrous excitement in her blue eyes was painful, the pallor of her face was frightful. She had clasped her hands round his arm, and the fingers held him like steel fetters. He tried to shake off her hold, but she did not seem aware of the movement.

"I tell you," she continued, "no dream was ever wilder than your hope of escape, if those two men come to London and find you here; no such possibility exists. Let us go; let us get out of the reach of their power."

"By —, I'll put myself out of Dallas's reach by a very simple method, if you don't hold your cursed tongue," said Routh, with such ferocity that Harriet let go her hold of him, and shrank as if he had struck her. "If you don't want me to tell Mr Felton what has become of his son, and put him on to George's trail myself, you'll drop this kind of thing at once. In fact," he said, with a savage sneer, "I hardly think a better way out of our infernal blunder could be found."

"Stewart, Stewart!" She said no more.

"Now listen to me, Harriet," he went on, in furious anger, but in a suppressed tone. "If you are anything like the wise woman you used to be, you won't provoke a desperate man. Let me alone, I tell you—let me get out of this as I best can. The worst part of it is what you have brought upon me. I don't want George Dallas to come to any serious grief, if I can help it; but if he threatens danger to me, he must clear the way, that's all. I dare say you are very sorry, and all that. You rather took to Master George lately, believed in his prudence, and his mother, and all that kind of thing; but I can't help that. I never had a turn for sentiment myself; but this you may be sure of—only

gross blundering can bring anything of the kind about—if any one is to swing for Dean, it shall be Dallas, and not I."

A strong shudder shook Harriet's frame as she heard her husband's words. But she repressed it, and spoke:

"You refuse to listen to me, then, Stewart. You will not keep your promise—your promise which, however vague, I have built upon and lived upon since we left Homburg? You will not 'think of' what I said to you there? Not though it is a thousand times more important now? You will not leave this life, and come away to peace and safety?"

"No, no; a thousand times no!" said Routh, in the wildest fury. "I will not—I will not! A life of peace and safety; yes, and a life of poverty, and *you*—" he added, in a tone of bitterest scorn and hatred.

A wonderful look came into the woman's face as she heard his cruel and dastardly words. As the pink had faded into the white upon her cheeks, so now the white deadened into gray—into an ashen ghostly gray, and her dry lips parted slowly, emitting a heavy sigh.

He made a step or two towards the door, she retreating before him. And when he had almost reached it, she fell suddenly upon her knees, and flung her arms round him with desperate energy.

"Stewart," she said, in a whisper indeed, yet in a voice to be heard amid a whirlwind, "my husband, my love, my life, my darling, don't mind me! Leave me here; it will be safer, better, less suspicious. Go away, and leave me. I don't care, indeed. I don't want to go with you. Go alone, and make sure of your safety! Stewart, say you'll go—say you'll go!"

While she was speaking, he was striving to loosen her hold upon him, but in vain. A short brief warfare was waged in that moment in his soul. If he softened to her now, if he yielded to her now, all was undone. And yet what love was this—what strange, and wondrous, and potent kind of love was this? Not the kind of love which had looked at him, an hour or two ago, out of the rich black eyes of the American widow, that had trembled in the tones of her voice. But a vision of the beauty he

coveted, of the wealth he needed, of the freedom he panted for, rose before Routh's bewildered brain, and the strife ended. Evil had its own way unchecked henceforth to the end.

He raised his right arm and struck her heavily upon the face; the clasp of her hands gave way, and she sank upon the floor. Then he stepped over her, as she lay prostrate in the doorway, and left the room. When she raised herself, she pushed back her hair, and looked round with a dreary amazement upon her troubled face, and she heard the key turned in his dressing-room door.

The day had dawned when Harriet Routh went gently up-stairs to her bed-room. She was perfectly calm. She opened the window-shutters and let the light in before she lay down on her bed. Also, she unlocked a box, which she took from her wardrobe, and looked carefully into it, then put it away satisfied. As she closed her eyes, she said, half aloud, "I can do no more; but she can save him, and she shall."

At one o'clock on the following day, Harriet Routh, attired, as usual, in simple but ladylike dress, and presenting an appearance on which the most impertinent of pages would not have dared to cast an imputation, presented herself at No. 4 Hollington-square, Brompton. Mrs Bembridge lived there, but Mrs Bembridge was not at home, and would not be at home until late in the evening. Would the lady leave her name? No; but she desired Mrs Bembridge might be informed that a lady had called, and would call again at the same hour on the morrow, who had found an article of dress lost at Homburg by Mrs Bembridge, and which she would restore to Mrs Bembridge in person, but not otherwise.

As Harriet was returning home, she walked down Piccadilly, and saw Mr Felton and George Dallas alighting from a cab at the door of the house in which their lodgings had been engaged.

"Very fair, too," said Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, when she received Harriet's message from her maid, "and very natural she should expect a reward. Ladies often take advantage of that kind of thing to give money to the poor. I shan't grudge her anything she may ask in reason, I shall be so glad to get back my golden egg."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"INFORMATION RECEIVED."

WHEN George Dallas knew that his meeting with Clare Carruthers was imminent, he told his uncle one of the two circumstances of his life which he had hitherto concealed from him. As George expected, Mr Felton received the communication with some seriousness. "A little while ago, George," he said, "this might have upset the new and good understanding happily established between Mr Carruthers and yourself, but I am in hopes it will not do so now. I think the old gentleman's nature is fine and forgiving, when one gets beneath the crust, and I am not afraid now. The chance of seeing the young lady, not in his presence, for the first time—that would have been awkward and dangerous indeed—is most fortunate. You must make your peace with her in the first instance."

Enough of the old habit of trick and expedient still adhered to George, in his improved moral condition, to induce him to entertain a passing thought that perhaps the necessity for Mr Carruthers knowing he had had any previous acquaintance with Clare might never arise; if she did not see that he must be told, George need not feel himself bound to tell him. But he rejected the impulse after a very little while, and was ashamed of it. When, therefore, Mr Felton had left George alone at Sir Thomas Boldero's house, he had done so with intention, and without any purpose of returning.

"Meet me at my rooms afterwards," he had said to George. "And tell Miss Carruthers I will take leave to call on her at Mrs Stanhope's this afternoon." George agreed, premising that he must look in at the *Mercury* office first, but would then be at his uncle's service. Left alone, he had applied himself, in a condition of extreme mental discomposure, to thinking of what he should say to Clare, and how he should say it. He had almost arranged a satisfactory programme before she came; after—well, after, he did not speak or look in the least like what he had intended, and

if any one had asked him for an account of their interview (which no one did, it was destined to be utterly forgotten and overwhelmed in the tide of events), he would have been quite incapable of satisfying the demand.

The interview lasted long, and when, at its close, George Dallas put Clare Carruthers into her cousin's carriage, her face was closely veiled, and the little hand which lingered in his had not yet done trembling. As he stood on the door-step and watched the carriage out of sight, the young man's face was pale and agitated, but full of deep and sacred happiness too. An expression of resolve and hope, of courage and power, was upon his features, such as they had never before worn. Had he recalled the resolution he had taken for the time when Clare Carruthers should know Paul Ward as George Dallas, and had he renewed it, with fresh heart and energy, not unaided now by circumstances, not frowned upon by fate, no longer friendless? However that may have been, he carried a humbled and grateful heart with him, and felt himself a widely different man as he entered the dingy precincts of the *Mercury* office, from what he had been the last time he had crossed that threshold.

Mr Cunningham was "in," and not only could see George, but was particularly anxious to see him.

"I was just writing to you, old fellow," he said, leaving off shaking hands with George, and beginning to tear up a brief and scrawly manuscript on flimsy which lay before him. "You have come in time to save me trouble and fourpence sterling."

"Anything about the business I wrote to you about?" asked George.

"Just that, sir. Of course I attended to it at once, and put Tatlow on to it on your account. They're said to be cautious chaps, the detectives, and of course it wouldn't pay for them to be said to be anything else; but I'm hanged if I ever believed it before. You may talk of depth, but Tatlow's unfathomable. Has the job from you, sir, per medium of your humble servant, and flatly declines to report progress to me; goes in for doing business only with the principal, and when he comes to me not a

word can I get out of him, except that he must know the address of a certain individual named Paul Ward."

"Paul Ward?" exclaimed George.

"Yes, Paul Ward! Great fun, isn't it, George? And I really could not resist the joke of quizzing the detective a little bit. I was immensely tickled at the idea of your employing the man, and his looking after you. So I told him I knew Mr Dallas was acquainted with a gentleman of that name, and could give him all the information he required."

George could not laugh, but he tried to smile. Nothing could lend the subject of his uncle's suspense and anxiety even a collaterally amusing effect for him, and this statement puzzled him.

"What on earth can I have to do with the matter?" he said. "The man must be travelling very far indeed out of the right tracks. No one in the world, as it is pretty plain, can be more ignorant of Felton's affairs than I am. He must be on a totally wrong scent; and if he has blundered in this way, it is only waste of time and money to employ him."

"Well," said Cunningham, a little disappointed that George did not enjoy the keenness of the capital joke as much as he did, "you must settle all that with him yourself, and find out from him, if you can—and, by Jove, I doubt it—how Paul Ward has got mixed up in your cousin's affairs (if he has got mixed up in them—and, mind, I don't feel sure even of that—he certainly did not say so) without your being a party to the transaction. I just gave Tatlow your address in Piccadilly, and told him you'd be there in a day or two."

"What did he say?" asked George, whose sense of mystification was increasing.

"Said he should call every day until you arrived,—no doubt he has been there to-day, or you'll find him there when you get home,—and disappeared, having got all the information I chose to give him, but not what he wanted; which is, I take it, the correct thing to do to a detective who observes the laws of discretion too absolutely."

Cunningham was laughing his jolly laugh, and George was wondering what Tatlow meant, when the entrance of a third individual on office business interrupted the friends' talk. George took leave, and went down-stairs. Arrived at the door, he stopped, ran up the first flight of dirty stairs again, and turned into a small room, dimly lighted by a dirty skylight, to the right of the first landing. In this sanctuary, strong smelling of dust, size, and printer's ink, lay files, bound and unbound, of the *Mercury*. A heavy volume was open on the clumsy thick-legged table which filled up the centre of the room. It contained the files of the newspaper for the first half of the current year.

"Let me see," said George, "she was not quite sure about the 22nd; but it must have been about that date."

Then he turned the leaves, and scanned the columns of advertisements, until he found in one the warning which Clare Carruthers had sent to Paul Ward. His eyes filled with tears as he read it. He called up one of the office people, and had a copy of the paper of that date looked for, out of which he carefully cut the advertisement, and consigned it to the keeping of the pocket-book which he always carried about him. He placed the little slip of printed paper in the same compartment in which Clare Carruthers's unconscious gift had so long lain hidden. As George threw open the doors of the hansom in which he had been driven from the *Mercury* office to Piccadilly, Jim Swain came to the wheel, and, touching his tousled head, asked if he might speak to him.

"Certainly," said George, getting out; "any message from Mr Routh?"

"No, sir," said Jim, "it's not; it's somethin' very partic'lar, as I as 'ad to say to you this long time. It ain't rightly about myself—and—"

"Never mind, Jim; you can tell me all about it in the house," said George cheerily. "Come along." He opened the door with his key, and let himself and Jim into the hall. But there Mr Felton met him, his face grave and care-worn, and, as George saw in a minute, with some additional lines of trouble in it.

"I'm so glad you have come, George. I found letters here when I got back."

"Letters from New York?"

"Yes."

George left Jim standing on the mat, going with his uncle into the room he had just left.

Mr James Swain, who was accustomed to pass a good deal of his life in waiting about on steps, in passages, at horses' heads, and occasionally in kitchens, and to whom the comfortable hall of the house in Piccadilly presented itself as an agreeable temporary abode, considered it advisable to sit down and attend the leisure of Mr Dallas. He had been for some minutes engaged partly in thinking what he should say to Mr Dallas, partly in counting the squares in the tiles which floored the hall, hearing all the while a subdued sound of voices from the adjoining room, when a strange sort of cry reached his ears. He started up, and listened intently. The cry was not repeated; but in a few moments Mr Felton came into the hall, looking frightened, and called loudly down the lower staircase for assistance. Two servants, a man and a woman, came quickly, and in the mean time Jim looked in at the open door. In another minute they were all in the dining-room in a confused group, gathered round an arm-chair, in which was lying the insensible death-like figure of George Dallas, his collar and necktie torn off, his waistcoat open, several letters on the table before him, and a card on the floor at his feet.

It was a very complete and dead swoon, and there was no explanation of it; none to be given to the servants, at least. Jim Swain did not touch George—he only looked on; and as, at the suggestion of the woman, they opened the window, and pushed the chair on which George was lying within the current of air, he picked up the card, over which one of the castors had passed. It was a small photographic portrait. The boy looked at it, and recognized, with surprise, that it was the likeness of Mr Deane—that it was a fac-simile of a portrait he had looked at and handled a very little while ago. He put it down upon the table, and made to Mr Felton the business-like suggestion that a doctor had better be sent for, and he had better be sent to fetch him, which was immediately acceded to.

When Jim returned, bringing with him a general practitioner, he was told that Mr Dallas had "come to," but was "uncommon weak and confused, and crying like a child when he wasn't shivering," so that Jim felt his chances of an interview were small indeed.

"I can't see him, of course, and I wanted to, most partic'lar. He brought me in, hisself."

"Yes, yes, I know," said the male domestic, with importance ; "but you can't see him, and there's no good in your waiting about here. Look round at eleven to-morrow, and I'll see what can be done for you."

Jim had nothing for it but to go disconsolately away. So he went.

While George Dallas and Clare Carruthers were talking together at Sir Thomas Boldero's house in Chesham-place, while the hours—never to be forgotten by either—were passing over them, the same hours were witnessing an interview not less momentous for Harriet Routh and her beautiful foe.

Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge was ready to receive her visitor ; and as her coquetry and vanity were omnivorous, much as she despised women, and sincerely as she enjoyed the knowledge of her power to make most of them envious and miserable, she had dressed herself very carefully. She was just a little bored by her present mode of existence. Routh could not be much with her ; and though she had brought herself to believe that she really did feel an absorbing passion for him, somehow or other it left a good deal of her thoughts and her time unabsorbed, and she did not exactly know how to dispose of either. The romance of this kind of incognito life was all very well in its way, which was a pleasant way, and as far as it went, which certainly was very far, but not quite far enough. And she did get horribly bored, there was no denying it. When Routh's daily letter had been read—for she exacted that of him, of him who hated letter-writing, and whose hard actuality of nature needed all the incitement of her beauty, her coquetry, and her artfulness to rouse him to sentiment and give his language the eloquence of love—she had nothing but

novels to fall back upon, and the vague prospect of a supplementary note or two, or trying on a new dress, or thinking what theatre she would go to, or what direction her afternoon drive should take. She was glad of the chance of seeing a new face, though it was only a woman's; and then the reason for receiving her was so sound, it was impossible Routh could object. Indeed, she could not see the force of his objections to her going out more, and seeing people in general; it could not matter now, and would sound better hereafter than this hidden residence in London; however, it could not last long, and it was very romantic, very. She had not had much chance in all her previous prosperous life of playing at romance, and she liked it; she would not like it, if it continued to mean boredom, much longer, but there was no danger of that.

No. 4 Hollington-square was one of those London houses which every one knows, furnished for people who take houses for the season, prettily, flimsily, sparingly; a house which tenants with money and taste could make very striking and attractive, which tenants without money and without taste would find very tolerable in its original condition. Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge possessed both; and as she made it a rule to have every advantage procurable by the use of either, the drawing-room in which she awaited the coming of her visitor was as pretty and coquettish a room as could easily have been seen. She had chosen a becoming costume, and an equally becoming attitude; and she looked beautiful indeed, in her rich morning dress of black silk, faced with rose-coloured satin and costlily lace. The masses of her dark hair were coiled smoothly round her head, her white arms were without a jewel to turn the eye from their shapely beauty. She glanced at one of the many mirrors in the room as the page announced "a lady," and felt perfectly satisfied.

The room was long and narrow, though not large; and as Harriet walked from the door to the hearth-rug on which Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge stood, having gracefully risen in an attitude especially intended for her visitor's admiration, that lady had time to observe her appearance, and to experience a certain vague sense of discomfort not altogether unlike alarm. She saw a face which she re-

membered, but with which she could not connect any distinct recollection ; a pale, fair, determined face with smooth light-brown hair framing a broad low brow, with keen piercing blue eyes, which looked steadily at her, and never dropped their fine-fringed lids, blue eyes in which power, will, and knowledge dwelt, as the shallow-souled woman they looked at, and through, felt, but did not understand. A face, so fixed in its expression of irremediable woe, a face so lost with all its self-possession, so full of despair with all its might of will, that a duller intellect than that of a meagre-brained woman must have recognized a story in it such as happily few human beings have to tell or to conceal. Harriet did not speak, or make any sign of salutation ; but when she had quite reached her, Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge recovered herself, and said, with all her accustomed grace :

"I am so much obliged to you for calling. Pray take a seat. I think I know to what I am indebted for the pleasure of your visit ;" and then she sank gracefully back into her low chair, and smiled her very best smile. The very best of those suited to the feminine capacity, of course. Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge had quite a different set of smiles for men.

"I am quite sure you do not," said Harriet, in a low firm voice, and without availing herself of the invitation to be seated. "I am quite sure you have no notion of my business here. You shall know it ; it is important, but brief."

"Madam," said the other, sitting upright, and turning slightly pale.

Harriet extended her hand with a gesture habitual to her, and said :

"Stay. You must hear me for your own sake. You will do well to hear me quietly, and to give me your very best attention. If I do not make the impression on you which I desire and intend to make, there is one other person beside myself who will suffer by my failure, and that person is you."

She dropped her hand and drew her breath. Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge looked at her with frightened distended eyes, speechless.

"You think I have come on a false pretext, and I have done

so, to a certain extent. You lost an article of ornament or dress at Homburg?"

"I did—a locket," said Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, a little relieved, and glancing unconsciously towards her silver purse, which was at hand, and through whose meshes gold shone.

"I know, but I have not brought you your locket. You lost something else at Homburg, and I have brought it, to prove that you had better hear me, and that you must." And then Harriet laid upon the table, near by the side of the silver purse, a crushed and faded flower, whose rich luscious blossom had been of the deepest crimson in the time of its bloom, when it had nestled against a woman's silken hair.

"What is it? What do you mean? Good God, who are you?" said Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, shrinking back as Harriet made the one step necessary to enable her to reach the table.

"I am Stewart Routh's wife," she replied, slowly, and without changing her tone, or releasing the other woman from her steady gaze.

This time Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge sprang to her feet, with a face as white as death.

"Don't be frightened," said Harriet, with the faintest glimmer of a contemptuous smile, which was the last expression having relation to Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge personally, that showed itself in her face, until the end. "I did not come here to inspire you with any fear of me; I did not come here on your account at all, or on mine; but for another motive."

"What, what is it?" said her hearer, nervously reseating herself.

"My husband's safety," said Harriet; and as she spoke the words, Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge felt that an illusion was rolled away from her for ever. He belonged to this pale stern woman, whose unsparing eyes were fixed upon her, whose unfaltering voice had not a tone of doubt or weakness in it. In every line of her countenance was the assertion of her right, against which the other felt powerless, and in whose presence her self-confidence was utterly subdued.

Calm and still, Harriet Routh stood before her, her head bent

forward, her hands clasped and pressed steadily against her waist.

"I have no time to lose," she said, "and the briefest explanation will, in this case, be the best. When that flower fell from your hair over the balcony at the Kursaal at Homburg, it fell at my feet. I was on the terrace beneath. If once, during the time you and he stood there, my husband had looked away from you and over the rail, he would have seen me. But he did not. I had come to that particular spot accidentally, though I was there that night because I suspected, because I knew, that he was there with you, and I would not condemn him unseen, unconvicted."

Cowering before her, her pale face in her shaking hands, the other woman listened.

"I heard all he said to you. Don't start; it was very pretty. I know it all, by heart; every intonation, every hesitation—all the lying gamut from end to end. I heard all the story he told you of his marriage: every incident, every declaration, every sentiment, was a lie! He told you he had married a poor, passionate, silly girl, who had compromised herself through her undisciplined and unreturned love for him, for pity—for a man's pity for a woman! A lie. He told you his wife was an oddity, a nervous recluse, oblivious of all but her health and her valetudinarian fancies; that she had no love for him, or any one; no mind, no tastes, no individuality; that his life was a dreary one, and the oscillation of a heart which had never been hers towards so irresistible a woman as you (and he was right, so far; you are very, very beautiful—I saw that, and granted it to myself, at once) was no sin, no dishonesty, against her. All a lie. Look at me, if you have the little courage needed for looking at me, and tell me if it *could* be true!"

Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge looked at her, but only to drop her head into her hands, and moan in the presence of the white face and the steady sparkling blue eyes.

"This was the lie he told you concerning me. The lie he told you about himself was more important in its results; and as it flattered you, of course you gave it ready credence. No doubt you believe it still, though you must know him better now. He

told you a story of his misunderstood, undervalued life ; of family pride, and grandeur, and wealth—of family ties severed in consequence of the charitable, chivalrous, self-sacrificing marriage he had made ; of obscurity nobly borne and toil willingly encountered, of talents unremittingly exercised without fame or reward, of high aspirations and future possibilities, if only the agency of wealth and the incentive of *love* might be his. And this flimsy tale caught your fancy and your faith. It was so charming to fill the vacant place in the misunderstood man's life, so delightful to be at once queen and consoler, to supply all the deficiencies of this deplorable wife. It was just the programme to catch the fancy of a woman like you, beautiful, vain, and empty."

There was neither scorn nor anger in Harriet's voice ; there was merely a dash of reflection, as if she had strayed for a moment from the track of her discourse.

"But it was all a lie," she went on. "His story of me, and his story of himself, were both equally false. Into the truth, as regards myself, I do not choose to enter. It is needless, and you are as incapable of understanding as you are indifferent to it. The truth about him I mean to tell you for his sake."

"Why?" stammered the listener.

"Because he is in danger, and I want to save him, because I love him—*him*, mind you, not the man you have fancied him, not the persuasive bland lover you have found him, no doubt ; for I conclude he has not changed the character he assumed that night upon the balcony ; but the hard, the cruel, the desperate man he *is*. I tell you"—she drew a little nearer, and again Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge shrank from her—"he is a swindler, a liar, and a thief ; he has lived by such means for years, was living by them when he married me. They are failing him now, and he feels the game is up here. What his exact plan is, of course I do not know ; but that it includes getting you and your fortune into his power I have no doubt."

Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge shivered now under the unsparing gaze. If only this woman would turn her eyes away from her, she thought, in the midst of her fear and amazement—the eyes

that pierced her, that suffocated her, like the gripe of a fierce hand upon her throat. She did not know his plan. No ; but who could look at her and doubt that, if she chose to know it, she could force the information from her hearer ? Who could listen to her cold even tones, and dream of resisting their implacable power ?

"Whatever his plan may be," Harriet continued, "he is entirely absorbed in it, and he is indifferent to all beside. Mind, I don't say you count for nothing in this : you are too vain to believe, I am too wise to say, anything of the kind. But your beauty, which he likes, would never have tempted him to an insane disregard of his safety, would never have kept him here when the merest prudence should have driven him far away. He wants you, but he wants your money more urgently and desperately. He needs time to win you and it, no matter how he means to do it, and time is what he has not to give, time is the one stake it is ruin to him to risk in this game. Do you hear me ? Do you understand me ?"

The blank white face feebly looked a negative.

"No. Then I will put it more plainly. My husband, your lover, the man who is trying to ruin you in reputation, that he may have the power to ruin you in fortune, is in imminent danger. Flight, and flight alone, could save him ; but he refuses to fly, because he will not leave *you*."

"What—what has he done ?"

"He has been concerned in a robbery," said Harriet with perfect composure, "and I know the police are on the right track, and will soon come up with him. But he is desperate, and refuses to go. I did not know why until yesterday, when I found you had followed him from Homburg—by arrangement, of course. Tush, woman ! don't try to deny it. What does it matter to me ? A lie more or less, a villany more or less, makes no difference in him for me ; but I knew then why he was obstinately bent on waiting for his fate."

"I—I don't believe you," said Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge ; and she half rose from her chair, and stretched her hand towards the bell. But Harriet stopped her by the lifting of a finger.

"O yes, you do," she said; "you believe me implicitly. You have been afraid of this man—even when he has flattered you, and won upon you most; you have never felt sure of him, and you know I am telling you the truth. But you are weak, and you would like to think you had not been quite so egregiously deceived. I cannot, for his sake, leave you this comfort. You lost a locket at Homburg—a golden egg-shaped toy—with two portraits in it, one of yourself, the other of a young man, a countryman of yours, an admirer. You prized the thing, you showed it to my husband, you talked of its value—is this true?"

"Yes, yes, it is true—what then?"

"This then: he stole that locket from you, as he sat by you, in your carriage, and talked sentiment and compliment to you. He stole the locket—it does not sound nice or heroic; he stole it, I tell you."

"Impossible—impossible."

"Am I in the confidence of your mind? Do I know the contents of your jewel-case? But this is folly, this is pretence; you know in your soul that I am telling you the truth. And now for the reason of my telling it. If you think I am a jealous woman, come here to expose my husband to my rival, and take him from her by even such desperate means, you make my task harder, by giving me blind folly to deal with. I came with no thought of myself or you: though I do, indeed, save you by coming, I have no care, no wish to do so; you are nothing to me, but a danger in his path. That his safety will be yours too, is your fortune, not my doing. I care not; it might be your destruction, and it would be all one to me. I am not jealous *of you*; you are nothing to me, and he has long been lost to me. But he must not be lost to himself too, and for that I am here. I can do nothing with or for him more, but you can: he loves you, after his fashion, and you can save him."

"I—I save him—from what? how? what do you mean? If you have told me the truth, why should I, if I could?"

Calmly and contemplatively Harriet looked at her; calmly she said, as if to herself:

"And I am sure he thinks you love him! Wonderful, very

wonderful ; but," she went on with quicker utterance, "that does not matter. You can save him. I will answer your last question first : to convince you that this *must* be done, for your own sake, will save time. You did not know his character until now, but I think you know something of his temper ; I think you understand that he is a desperate man. Suppose you ~~black~~ with him now—and your mind has been made up to do that for several minutes—suppose you determine to save yourself from this swindler, this liar, this thief, to keep your character, and your money, and your beauty for a different fate, do you think he will let you go ? How do you propose to escape him ? You don't know. You are terribly frightened at the idea. I have come to tell you."

"You are a dreadful woman—you are a wicked, dreadful woman," said Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge with a moan.

"Yes," said Harriet, "I am a wicked, dreadful woman, but you need not fear me, though you have done me some wrong too, even according to your code, I think. Rouse yourself, and listen to me while I tell you what you must do."

Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge tried to obey her ; she shook back the hair which had fallen over her face, and looked up with eyes less scared, and more intelligent.

"If my husband has not left England by to-morrow," said Harriet with clear, distinct emphasis, "it will be too late to save him from the clutches of the law. Nothing will induce him to leave England while you remain here. What !" she said, with a sudden rush of burning red into her face and an indescribable fierce change of tone and manner. "What ! You were going, were you—and together ? Tell me instantly—instantly, I say—what is this I see in your face ?"

Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge caught at Harriet's gown, and stammered :

"Don't, don't ; I'll tell you !"

"Do you think I am going to strike you or kill you ; do you think I would touch you with one finger ?" said Harriet, in her former tone, and drawing her dress from the woman's grasp with a quiet determined movement. "Tell me instantly, and don't

fear. You were going away—and together? Where were you going, and when?"

"To New York—on Saturday."

Harriet Routh turned abruptly from her, and for one minute's duration of awful silence her face was hidden. Then, with a sound like a sigh and a sob, but such a sound as the listener had never heard before, she resumed her former position. The other dared not look at her for many minutes. When she did, Harriet's face fixed itself for ever on her memory as the ideal of the face of one who had died of sheer pain.

"Thank you. The acknowledgment at least is brave and true, and makes the rest easy. Am I to conclude you do not wish now to carry out this arrangement?"

"Oh no, no. For God's sake, save me!"

"In saving *him*. Yes. You must leave England to-night, and he must follow you to-morrow. Don't be frightened; I said follow, not meet you. You must really go. No pretence will avail. He could not be deceived in this. You must cross the Channel to-night, and telegraph to him to-morrow from some French town, which you can leave upon the instant, if you choose. That is your own affair. You may return to England to-morrow night, if you please, and reach Liverpool in time to sail for New York on Saturday. Thus you will escape him, and be free. He will not follow you against your will to New York, where you are protected by your friends and your position. You have but to write and forbid his doing so."

"I think—I think I understand," said Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge, in a voice full of submission and entreaty; "but how am I to account for going away?"

"At what hour do you expect him here to-day?" asked Harriet, in a business-like tone, without noticing the question.

"At nine in the evening."

"It is now nearly three. The tidal train for Folkestone starts at six. Your arrangements for next Saturday are all made, of course?"

"They are." Wonder and fear and a strange sense of depend-

ence on this dreadful woman were growing on Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge with every moment.

"Then all is easy—if you can trust your maid."

"I can, implicitly; but what must she do?"

"Settle everything here, and take your luggage to Liverpool. You will not be able to make an hour's delay on your return; you must go straight through. You must travel without a servant for once—no—take your page; he is better out of the way—"

"I will do as you tell me; but you have not said how I am to account for going."

"No," said Harriet, absently; "but that will be easy. He will think you a fool, and easily frightened, but your vanity must bear that—it's not a heavy price to pay for safety."

There was a pretty writing-table in the room, covered with elegant trifles. Harriet approached it, and opened a blotting-book. Some sheets of thick perfumed paper, with dainty monogram and motto, lay within it. On one of them she wrote as follows:

"All is discovered. Your wife has been here, and has terrified me by her threats. Our scheme must be abandoned. I cannot stay an hour here, not even to consult you; I am in fear of my life. Come to me at once, to Amiens. I leave to-night, and will telegraph from thence. If you do not join me on Saturday morning, I shall conclude you have given me up."

She rose, and desired Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge to take her place.

"Copy that," she said, briefly; but before the other took up the pen, she read the lines and exclaimed:

"I dare not—I dare not; he will kill you."

"That is *my* business," said Harriet fiercely. "Write!"

She copied the letter slowly, and trembling as she wrote, folded, sealed, and directed it.

"When is it to be sent?"

"When I have seen you off. I will take care he receives it," said Harriet, as she put it in her pocket. "Now go and give your directions, and make your preparations."

They looked at each other for a moment, and Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge left the room without another word. When she was alone, Harriet sat down by the table wearily, and covered her face

with her hands. Time went on, but she did not move. Servants came in and went out of the room, but she took no notice. At length Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge entered in travelling dress, and with a paler face than any mirror she had ever looked into had ever reflected. At the same moment a carriage came to the door.

"You are quite ready?"

"I am."

"It is time to go."

"Let us go. One minute. Mrs Routh, I—I don't think I quite knew what I was doing. Can you forgive me?" She half extended her hand, then drew it back, as she looked into Harriet's marble face.

"Forgive you! What do you mean? You are nothing to me, woman; or, if anything, only the executioner of a sentence independent of you."

Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge did not attempt to speak again. As they went out of the door, a telegram was handed to her. It was from Routh. "Impossible to see you to-night. Letter by post."

She handed the paper silently to Harriet, who read it, and said nothing until they were seated in the carriage.

"Does that make any difference?" then asked Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge timidly.

"To *you*, none. Possibly it may to me; he need not know so soon."

Not another word was spoken between them. Harriet stood on the platform at the railway station until the train moved off, and as Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge caught the last glimpse of her stern white face, she threw herself back in the carriage, in which she was fortunately alone, in an hysterical agony of tears.

Routh did not come home that night; he sent a message that business detained him in the City, and that he wished his letters and some clothes sent to him in the morning.

"This is well," said Harriet; "he is making his preparations, and he does not wish to see me before he must. The night can hardly pass without my hearing or seeing George."

Late that evening Harriet posted the letter which Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge had written. But the evening and the night passed, and George Dallas did not come or send. The hours were full of the agony of suspense for Harriet. They brought another kind of suffering to Mr Felton and his nephew.

At eight o'clock that evening George Dallas, alias Paul Ward, as the police phrase had it, was arrested at Mr Felton's lodgings, charged with the murder of Mr Felton's son. George's agent had done his work well, and the notes changed at Amsterdam, which the old bookseller's death had released from their hiding-place and put in circulation, had furnished the clue to Mr Tatlow's dexterous fingers. The notes bore Arthur Felton's initials; they had been paid to him by the Liverpool Bank; they were indorsed in full, with date too, by Paul Ward.

"And a case," said Mr Tatlow, who had a turn for quotation, "neater, completer, in every feater, I don't think I ever was in."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AT THE TIDAL TRAIN.

"THERE's a job for you to-day, Jim," said the irreproachable Harris to Mr James Swain, when he presented himself at half-past eight at Routh's house, according to his frequent custom.

"I didn't come after no jobs this mornin'," said Jim; "I come to see the missis."

"Ah, but you can't see her, she ain't up, and the job is particular wanted to be done."

Jim looked moody and discontent, but cheered up when Harris represented that he might see Mrs Routh on his return. The "job" was the delivery of Routh's clothes and letters, as directed, at his chambers in Tokenhouse-yard. The boy was troubled in his mind, irresolute. George Dallas's sudden illness, the photograph he had seen, these things added to the perplexity he was in already. Per-

haps he had better speak to Mrs Routh first ; he did not know ; at all events, he might tell her what had occurred yesterday, without mentioning the portrait, and see what effect it had upon her.

- He had thought about it all, until, between his imperfect knowledge of facts, his untaught intelligence, and his genuine but puzzled good-will, he was quite bewildered. He had brought with him that morning, with a vague notion that it might perhaps be advisable to show it to Mrs Routh, but a settled resolution to show it to Mr Dallas, the object which he kept carefully secreted in the hole in the wall at home, and as he trudged away Citywards, carrying a small leather bag containing the required clothes and letters, he turned it over and over in his grimy pocket and grew more and more thoughtful and depressed.

Arrived at Tokenhouse-yard, the clerk took the bag from him, and suggested that he had better wait, in case Mr Routh should require his further services. So Jim waited, and presently Routh came out into the passage. Jim's private opinion of Stewart Routh's character and disposition has been already stated ; of his personal appearance he entertained an equally low one, and much opposed to the general sentiment. "An ill-looking, down-looking dog I call him," Jim had said to himself more than once ; "more like the Pirate of the Persian Gulf, or the Bandit of Bokarer, I think, than anybody as I knows out of the pictures."

More ill-looking, more down-looking than ever Jim Swain thought Stewart Routh when he spoke to him that morning. His face was colourless, his eyes bloodshot, the glance troubled and wandering, his voice harsh and uneven. He gave Jim a brief order to meet him at the London-bridge railway-station the same evening at a quarter to six. "I shall have a message for you," said Routh. "Be punctual, remember." And then he turned away abruptly and went into his room, shutting the door roughly.

"He ain't in the best of humours, even of his own, and they're none on 'em good," thought Jim, as he turned out of Tokenhouse-yard and took his way westward again, keeping his hand permanently in his pocket this time. A fresh disappointment awaited him at Routh's house. Mrs Routh had gone out immediately

after she had breakfasted. Did she know he wanted to see her? Jim asked. Harris was rather tickled by the question.

"I say," he remarked, "you're getting on, Jim; you'll be as impudent as a cock sparrow presently. I didn't happen to tell her; but if I 'ad, do you think she'd a stayed in to give you the chance?"

"Yes, I do; wot's more, I'm sure she would," said Jim, and walked moodily away, leaving Mr Harris in a fine attitude of surprise upon the threshold. When that functionary finally left off looking after the boy, and shut the door, he did so to the accompaniment of a prolonged whistle.

It was only ten o'clock, and Jim had been told to go to Mr Dallas's at eleven. The interval troubled him; he could not settle his mind to the pursuit of odd jobs. He did not mind "hanging about;" he would hang about Piccadilly till the time came. But when Jim reached the house in which Mr Felton and Mr Dallas lodged, he was surprised to find it an object of lively curiosity to a number of persons who were crowding the pavement, notwithstanding the active interference of a policeman, endeavouring to clear a passage for two ladies whose carriage was before the door, and one of whom was evidently in the deepest distress. Jim plunged at once into the heart of the concourse, and asked a number of eager questions, to which he received simultaneous but contradictory replies.

"He's dead!" "No, he isn't." "He's his brother, I tell you; I heard the cook a-tellin' the milk-boy." "He ain't his brother; the old 'un's his uncle; and he's been and murdered his cousin." Such were a few of the sentences Jim caught as his curiosity and anxiety rose to frenzy.

"*Wot* is it? *wot* is it? Do tell me. Is anything wrong with Mr Dallas?" he asked imploringly of the servant who had opened the door to the two ladies (who had at last succeeded in entering the house), and was just about to shut it in the faces of a few scores of anxious inquirers endeavouring to pierce the depths of the hall, and to see through the dining-room doors. "Don't you know me? I was here yesterday. I have been here before. I was to see Mr Dallas at eleven. Can't I see him? Is he worse?"

The woman did know the boy, and she at once admitted him.

"Come in," she said; "I'll tell you inside. It's a deal worse than his death that's the matter." So Jim vanished into the house, a distinction which, being unattainable by themselves, was regarded with much indignation by the crowd. Temporarily dispersed by the active policeman, they gathered again, hoping the boy would come out, when they might pounce upon and extract information from him. But they waited in vain; the boy did not come out. The carriage still remained at the door, and in about an hour a gentleman of grave and busy aspect issued from the maddeningly mysterious mansion, stepped into the vehicle, and was driven rapidly away. The crowd was not in luck; no one heard the order given to the coachman. Then such silence and desolation as can ever fall on Piccadilly fell upon the scene, and the gay-looking, brightly-decorated house obstinately hid its secret.

The woman who recognized Jim told him the story of the events which had occurred in the hall, speaking in a hurried whisper and with much genuine womanly compassion. Jim heard her with a beating heart and shaking limbs. As the boy leaned against the wall, regardless of the damaging properties of his tousled head resting on the spotless paint, he wondered if this was like fainting, and whether he should be able to keep from "going off" like Mr Dallas.

"We're strangers to Mr Felton, of course," said the woman; "and it's natural everybody as can should like to keep their troubles to themselves, for it don't do no good tellin' of 'em, and people don't think no more of you; but there's things as can and things as can't be hid, and them as can't has been a takin' place here."

"Yes," said Jim, faintly; for the words he had heard in the crowd were ringing in his ears; "yes, yes; but tell me—"

"I'll tell you, as plain as I can make it out. Mr Felton had some letters yesterday—letters as come from America—and there were a carte of his son in 'em; he hasn't seen nor yet heard of him for ever so long; and when Mr Dallas see the carte he knew as the man was the same as was murdered, and never found out, in the spring."

"Well?" said Jim. "Yes? Go on." The faint feeling was subsiding; he was beginning to understand.

"It were an awful shock for Mr Dallas to find out as his cousin had been murdered, and to have to break it to the father; and no wonder he fainted over it. Nobody knows how he did it, but there must have been a dreadful scene; for I shouldn't ha' known Mr Felton from the dead when I went to ask, through their not answering James's knock, whether they was a goin' to have any dinner. He was sittin' in his chair, white and quiet; and Mr Dallas—he as had been took so bad himself in the beginnin'—he was kneeling on the ground beside him, and I think his arm was round his neck; but I couldn't see his face, for he only put out his hand, and says he, 'No, thank you, Mary; go away for a little, please.' I waited in the passage, but I never heard a word pass between them; and we didn't know whatever could be the matter, for we only knew about the letters after Mr Dallas had been took up."

"Mr Dallas took up? They said that outside, but I thought it must be their larks. Wotever do you mean? Go on—go on; tell me, quick!"

"It's quite true; no larks at all. It might be about eight or nine, and we was all sittin' downstairs, a talkin' about the parlours, and a very quick ring comes to the 'all-door. James opens it, and in comes two men, very short and business-like, which they must see Mr Dallas, and can't take no denial. So James goes to the door to ask if Mr Dallas will see them, but they're too quick for James, and walk in; and in two minutes there's a great to do and explanation, and Mr Dallas is took up."

"But wot for?—what had he done?" asked Jim.

"Murdered his cousin, don't I tell you!" said the woman a little snappishly. "Ain't I a-tellin' of you as plain as I can speak. He'd been and murdered this other gentleman wot nobody knew, in the spring, and then he sets the police a lookin' after his cousin, and just tells them enough to make them know as the other gentleman was him, which they'd never had a notion of before, so they come and took him on suspicion of the murder, and Mr Felton went away with him. We was all there, when

they put the handcuffs on him, and his uncle he stopped him in the 'all, as they was goin' to the cab, and says he, 'George, my boy, I do this, that no one may think I'm deceived ;' and he put his hands on his shoulders and kisses him, as if he was a woman, before us all."

Jim listened, pale and breathless, but quite silent.

"Mr Felton were out pretty near all night ; and when he come 'ome, the gentleman as is here now were with him. He hasn't been to bed at all, and I haven't seen him, but just when I let the lady in, which she's a sweet-lookin' creature, and has been cryin' dreadful."

"Let me see Mr Felton," said Jim, catching the woman by her dress, and speaking with the utmost eagerness and passion, "let me see him. I came to see Mr Dallas about this business, let me see Mr Felton."

"*You* came! why what have you got to do with it?" said the woman ; her curiosity vehemently aroused.

"I will tell you all about it," said Jim, adroitly ; "you shall hear it all afterwards—a cur'ous story as any one ever had to tell. Mr Dallas never did it—not he, I know better than that. I can tell Mr Felton a great deal."

"I must ask if he will see you," said the woman ; "if he won't, perhaps the lawyer—"

"No, no, it must be Mr Felton himself. Let me into the room."

She offered no resistance, and in another minute Jim was in the presence of a group composed of Mr Felton, a grave gentleman, who looked like a lawyer, a beautiful girl, who was Clare Carruthers, and a plain, clever-looking young woman, who was Clare's cousin, Mrs Stanhope. The lawyer and Mrs Stanhope were seated by a table in close conversation, which they carried on in lower tones. Clare Carruthers and Mr Felton stood upon the hearth-rug, the girl's golden head was resting on her companion's shoulder, and she was crying silently but unrestrained.

"Is he very, very ill?" she had said, a little before Jim entered the room.

"Not seriously so, my dear, and indeed nothing could be more

fortunate than that his strength failed him so completely. It gives us time, and I need it, I am so bewildered even yet."

"Did Mr Lowther say—say that he was not—not brought before the magistrates, not brought into that dreadful place, to-day?" said Clare, her voice hardly audible for her sobs.

"Yes, my dear. Think a little, I could not be here if he had not so much respite. Clare, I am a chief witness; I must be there, you know, to tell them about—about my son—" He paused, and closed his eyes for a few minutes.

"The case was called *pro forma* this morning, but Mr Lowther's partner, his brother, easily procured a delay. George was too ill to appear, but he sent me word that there was nothing seriously wrong."

"Can no one see him?" asked Clare imploringly. "Oh, Mr Felton, can no one go to him? Can no one give him any comfort—help him to bear it? Are they so cruel as that, are they so cruel?"

"Hush, dear, it is not cruel; it is right. No one can see him for the present but Mr Lowther—Mr James Lowther, who is with him now, I dare say, who will be here this afternoon."

"How can you bear it? how are you ever to bear it?" she said.

"My dear, I must bear it; and I have time before me in which to suffer: this is the time for action. You must help me, Clare, my dear, brave girl. I sent for you for this; I sent for you, at his desire, my child. His last words were, 'My mother, my mother, she is coming home to-morrow.' I told him to be satisfied she should be kept from the knowledge of all this." He shuddered from head to foot. "Clare, are you strong enough to redeem my promise? Can you hide all that has happened from her? Can you be with her, watching her, keeping a calm face before her? My dear, have you strength for this?"

She lifted her golden head, and looked at him with her innocent fearless eyes.

"I have strength to do anything that he—that George desires, and you think is right."

"Then that is your share of our dreadful task, my dear. God knows it is no light or easy share."

Clare's tears streamed forth again. She nestled closer to him, and whispered :

"Is there no—no hope?"

"None," he replied. "If it had been possible for George to be mistaken, I have had the sight of my own eyes. Clare, they brought me my son's coat! Ay, like Jacob, they brought my son's coat. My own last gift to him, Clare." His eyes were dry and bright, but their sockets had deepened since the day before, and his voice had the febrile accent of intense grief and passion restrained by a powerful will.

"What George must have suffered!" she said, still in a broken whisper, her tear-stained face upon his breast.

"Ah, yes, it is all dim to me still. Mr Lowther and I have been searching out the truth all night, but we are still in confusion. Tatlow is coming presently, and you must go away, my dear, you must go home. You have your share to do, and need strength to do it. You shall know all I learn from hour to hour. Mrs Stanhope, will you—who is this? What brings you here, boy?"

"Sir," stammered Jim, who, though he had the wizened manish look peculiar to his tribe, was only a boy, and was desperately frightened—"sir, I came to tell you that I know the man as didn't do it, and I know the man as did."

Mr Felton loosed his hold of Clare and came forward. Mr Lowther rose hurriedly from his seat; he did not share the blank, incredulous surprise of Mr Felton. The two ladies drew near each other.

"Who are you?" asked Mr Lowther.

Jim told him.

"What are you come for? What—" began Mr Felton; but Mr Lowther made a sign to him to be silent, and addressing Jim in a quiet, friendly voice, took him by the arm and led him to a chair.

"Sit down there, my boy," he said, "and don't be afraid. You

must have come here of your own free will, and we do not doubt you have come for a good purpose. You have something important to tell Mr Felton. You know Mr Dallas, I think, and I gather from what you said just now that you know what he is accused of." Jim assented by a downcast nod. "There, tell us all about it. Take your time, and don't get frightened." So saying, and giving the boy a reassuring pat upon the shoulder, the lawyer sat down upon a chair opposite to Jim, and spread his hands upon his knees in an attitude of serious, but not stern, attention. The two women looked on in silent suspense, and Mr Felton, guided by a glance from Mr Lowther, moved a little to the back of the chair on which Jim was seated.

"Come," said Mr Lowther, giving him another pat, "we are all anxious to hear what you have got to say. Speak up, my boy."

"Sir," began Jim, "I should like to ask you something first. Is it true, as the gentleman 'at was murdered was Mr Dallas's own cousin?"

"Only too true. He was Mr Felton's son," and the lawyer eyed the unhappy father, as if measuring the strength he could command to bear this new trial. Mr Felton came to Jim's side, and touched him kindly on the arm.

"Don't be afraid to speak before me," he said. "You may; and don't keep us waiting any longer, my good boy."

Then Jim made a desperate effort, and told his story; told it in his ignorant blundering fashion; told it with circumlocution and hesitation, but never interrupted. Mr Lowther heard him without a word, and held Mr Felton and the two women silent by the unspoken counsel of his glance.

"I had done many an odd job at the house in South Molton-street," said the boy, when he had told them a good deal about himself, in a rambling way, "and I knowed Mr Routh well, but I don't suppose he knowed me; and when I saw him a-lingerin' about the tavern, and a-lookin' in at the winder, he wosn't no stranger to me. Well, he giv' me the letter, and I giv' it to the gentleman. He had a beard as came down in a point, and was sharp with me, but not so sharp as the waiter, as I giv' *him* his own sauce, and the gentleman laughed, and seemed as if he didn't

object to me holdin' of my own ; but Mr Dallas, which I didn't know his name then, he didn't laugh, and he asks the gentleman if there weren't no answer, and the gentleman says no, there weren't none, and somehow I seemed to know as he wanted to spite Mr Routh. So I felt cur'ous about it, partickler when I see as Mr Routh looked savage when I came out of the coffee-room and told him there weren't no answer. You must understand," said Jim, who had regained his composure now, and was in the full tide of his discourse, which he addressed exclusively to Mr Lowther, with the instinctive delicacy which Harriet Routh had once observed in the neglected boy, "as I was not to say he was there, I were merely to give the note. He giv' me sixpence, and he went away down the Strand. I got a horse-holdin' job just then, and it were a long 'un ; and there I was when the two gents came to the door, a-smokin' their cigars, and then the gent as I held his horse took him from me, and I hadn't nothing better to do than follow them, which I did ; for who should I see but Mr Routh a-skulkin' along the other side of the Strand, as if he wanted to keep 'em in sight without their seein' of him. I follered them, sir, and follered them feelin' as if I was one of them 'ere wild Ingins in the '*Alfpenny Alf-hours* on a trail, until I follered them to Boyle's billiard-rooms, as I knows it well, and had swep' it often on a Sunday mornin'. They went in, and I was tired of hanging about, and was goin' away, when I see Mr Routh again ; there weren't nobody in the street but him and me. I skulked into a lane, and watched him. I don't know why I watched him, and I don't know how long we was there—I a little way down the lane, and he a-saunterin' up and down, and lookin' at the doors and the windows, but never goin' nigh the house. It must ha' been very late when the two gents came out, and I was very tired ; but the old woman—that's my aunt, sir—and me had had a row in the mornin', and I thought I'd like to giv' her a fright, and stay out all night, which I haven't often slep' in the streets, considerin'."

Jim had ceased to wriggle about on his chair, to twist his cap between his hands, and to shuffle his feet upon the floor. He was nearly as motionless as the listeners, who heard him in

breathless silence. By degrees Clare had drawn nearer to Mr Felton, and she was now standing, her hand in his, her head in its former place upon his shoulder, behind Jim's chair. But the character of the group formed by the two was no longer what it had been; the girl was supporting the man now; the girl was silently nerving him to courage and resolution.

"They came out, sir," the boy continued, "very friendly-like and good-humoured, and Mr Dallas he were a-laughin', and he shook hands with the other gent, which he called hisself Mr Deane—it were on the note; and he went away whistlin' down the very lane as I was in, passed me close, and never saw me. I saw him, though, quite plain, and I thought, 'You've been winnin', and you likes it;' but still I had my eye on Mr Routh, and presently I sees him speakin' to the other gent, as was puttin' on his big fur coat, which it had a 'ood to it as I never see one like it afore. I thought they wouldn't be pleasant together, and they wasn't, not to judge by their voices, and I heerd the other gent give a sneerin' kind of a laugh, which were aggravatin'; and soon they walked away together, through the Bar and up Fleet-street, and I follered 'em, for I thought I'd sleep under the dry arch of the bridge, and get a chance of odd jobs at the early trains in the mornin', which they're profitable if you ain't too tired. They was talkin' and talkin', and the oddest thing was that I knew they was quarrellin', though I couldn't hear a word they said, and I knew the other gent was a-sneerin' and a-aggravatin' of Mr Routh, and yet they was arm-in-arm all the time like brothers. They went on, and there wasn't a livin' bein' in the street but them and me and an odd p'liceman or so, wot took no notice, only beat their 'ands together and passed by. All on a sudden, when they was near the bridge, and close to all the little narrow streets down there, I gets tired, and don't seem to care about follerin' of 'em; and then, while I'm thinkin' of makin' for the dry arch, I misses of 'em, and they're gone."

The boy stood up now, and his cap fell unheeded on the floor. The embarrassment, the confusion, the vulgarity of his manner were gone; he met the lawyer's piercing gaze unabashed; he lifted his hand and moved it with an expressive gesture.

"It was gettin' light overhead, and I was tired, and my head begin to turn. I sat down in a doorway; there wasn't no one to move me on, and I must ha' fell asleep, for I don't remember any more until I heard something pass by me very quick,—quite near me, as near as Mr Dallas passed me in the lane. I looked up pretty smart, and, sir, it were a man."

"Mr Routh?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes, sir, it were Mr Routh. His head were down, and he was goin' as quick as any man could walk, short of running, but he did not run. I roused up, and wondered where the other gent was, and then I see a narrow passage a little way off the doorway where I was a settin', leadin' straight to the river. I thought they must ha' turned down there to have their talk out, when I missed them so sudden. I went down the passage, and at the end of it was stones and mud and the river; and there was no one there. But O, sir,"—and here Jim began to tremble and to look nervously round towards Mr Felton,—“there were blood on the edge of the stones, and footsteps in the mud where the water was a-creepin' up, and there was no one there.”

A convulsive sob burst from Clare's lips; but Mr Felton clasped her closer to him, and kept her quiet.

"A dreadful sight—a dreadful discovery," said Mr Lowther; "but, my boy," and again he touched Jim gently on the arm, "why did you conceal it? Did you not understand the crime that had been committed? Did you not know all that happened afterwards?"

"Sir," said Jim, boldly, but not without an effort, "I was not sure; I thought it might have been a fight, and that ain't murder anyways. I didn't know as how it had been stabbin' until I see it in *Lloyd's Weekly*, for I kep' away on purpose."

Here Jim put his hand into his pocket, and drew it out again closed round some object which he had still a lingering reluctance to show.

"I'll tell you all the truth, sir, though I daresay I must get into trouble. If it hadn't been as I was afraid of getting into it, I should ha' spoke before when I see Mrs Routh, as is a good lady, a-frettin' herself to death, and him a-deceivin' of her. When

I was a-looking close at the stones and the mud, and the blood upon 'em, which the tide was very nigh upon it afore I came away, I see something nearly stamped into the mud as looked like gold, and I fished it out, and I knew it were something as I had seen hangin' on the other gent's chain, which he was a-twiddlin' on it with his fingers when I giv' him the note in the coffee-room. I fished it out, sir, and I kep' it, and I was afraid to take it to the pawnshop when I heerd as the body was found; and as it were a murder, I was afraid to sell it neither, and I hid it in the wall, and—and," said Jim, speaking with great rapidity and earnestness, "I am glad I've told the truth, for Mr Dallas's sake, and I'm ready to suffer for it, if I must. Here it is, sir." Then the boy unclosed his hand, and placed in that of Mr Lowther a locket in the form of a golden egg.

"It opens in the middle," said Jim, "and there's pictures in it: one is Mr Deane's, and the other is a lady's. I know where she lives, and I saw Mr Routh with her on Monday night. Mr Routh has another, just the same as this,—on the outside any-ways."

"Do you recognize this trinket?" asked Mr Lowther of Mr Felton, who replied:

"I do. It was my son's."

A few minutes of close and anxious consultation between the gentlemen followed, and then Mr Lowther, telling Jim that he must remain with Mr Felton until his return, went out, and was driven away in Mrs Stanhope's carriage. Mr Felton and the two women treated the boy with kind consideration. In the frightful position in which they were all placed, there was now a prospect of relief, not, indeed, from the tremendous calamity, but from the dreadful danger, and Jim, as the medium through which the hope shone, was very valuable to them. Food was given him, of a quality rare to the street-boy, and he ate it with sufficient appetite. Thus the time passed, until Mr Lowther returned, accompanied by a small smart man in a gray suit, who was no other than Mr Tatlow, and whose first words to Mr Felton were:

"It's all right, sir. We've got the other warrant."

Then Mr Felton sent Clare and her cousin away, and Jim, having been cheered and consoled by many a reassuring word and promise from Mr Felton, whose strength and self-control proved themselves to the utmost on this occasion, underwent a long and searching examination from Mr Lowther and the self-congratulatory Tatlow.

The afternoon was already advanced, and Mr Tatlow had gone away and returned again, when the boy's explanation was concluded, and the plans formed upon it were finally arranged. Then the lawyer's quick eye noticed symptoms of giving way in Mr Felton. There were many hours of excitement and strain upon the nerves still to be endured, and not yet might he be free to face the grief which was his—pre-eminently his; not yet must he seek solitude, to mourn for his only son. Anguish, fear, and fatigue were setting their mark upon him, but he must not yet have even bodily rest.

"You will not come with us?" said Mr Lowther.

"No," replied Mr Felton, with an irrepressible shudder. "I could not see that man before *I must*."

"You will lie down and rest?"

"Not yet. I will rest to-night. I must see my brother-in-law, who will reach London this evening, and tell him all that has happened."

"Your brother-in-law?"

"Mr Carruthers, my sister's husband. Much depends on George's mother being kept in ignorance, and Mr Carruthers must be prepared."

During this short dialogue, Jim had been speaking eagerly to Mr Tatlow, apparently urging very strongly an earnest appeal. On its cessation, Mr Tatlow addressed Mr Lowther.

"He agrees to everything, if one of you gentlemen will write to Mrs Routh for him. That's it, ain't it?" said he, turning again to Jim.

"Yes, sir," said the boy, with an earnestness of entreaty in his voice and his look which touched the listeners. "If one of you will write to *her*. I don't mean a letter of your own—grand like—for then she mightn't believe it, and she might think as I was

paid. I did it for Mr Dallas ; but I don't think as I should have done it if he hadn't been bad to her, and if I hadn't seen her a-dyin' day after day, as courageous as can be, but still a-dyin', and he a-neglectin' of her first and deceivin' of her after."

"She is this man's accomplice," said Mr Lowther, moodily.

"Perhaps so, to a certain extent," said Mr Felton ; "but she is to be pitied, too. I saw that. I saw a little way into her life at Homburg, and, from all George has told me, I would be as little hard with her as possible. He cannot escape us, she cannot shield him ; let us hear what the boy wishes to say to her, and then decide. Tell me," he said, kindly, to Jim, "what do you wish to say to this lady?"

"You must understand," said Mr Tatlow, "that you can't send your letter till we've got him."

"I don't want to, sir," said Jim. "I think as he's runnin' away from her to-night, partik'lar as the lady is gone."

(Mr Tatlow had ascertained the fact of Mrs Ireton P. Bembridge's departure during his brief absence.)

"He didn't go home last night, and I think as he's afraid to face her, and is runnin' away to-night."

"Very well, then," said Mr Lowther, "I will write the letter. You shall tell me what to say, and it shall be sent to her this evening."

So Jim dictated, with infinite difficulty and astonishing slowness, and Mr Lowther wrote :

"Dear Ma'am,—This comes from Jim Swain, as wouldn't like to hurt you, but has to tell at last, because of Mr Dallas being took for what he didn't do. I wanted to see you to-day, but you was out, and I couldn't, and I come down here and heard of Mr Dallas being took. You weren't in it, dear ma'am, I'm sure, and so I have told the gentlemen and Mr Tatlow, which has me in charge at present ; but you know it, and that Mr Dallas did not do it, and Mr Routh did. I followed them all the night it was done, and I saw Mr Dean and Mr Routh going down to the river, and I went down to the river, when one was gone away alive and the other couldn't be found, only his blood on the stones, and I found the gold thing he had on his chain, which the gentleman has it now, and Mr Routh

have the same in a little drawer in the big desk in the parlour. I haven't hid anything, dear ma'am, and Mr Routh will be took, at six o'clock, at the railway, where he told me to meet him, which so I am to do. I know about a lady, too, which her picture is in the gold thing, and I would have told you about her if I could have seen you to-day. I hope you won't be hurt. I didn't mean to do it to hurt you. I wish I hadn't been so secret so long."

When Jim had formally made his mark, the letter was sealed and directed, and Mr Lowther took charge of it.

Considerably before the platform of the London-bridge railway-station, from which the tidal train for Folkstone was about to start, had received the usual crowd of passengers and their friends, a lady, plainly dressed and closely veiled, made her unobtrusive appearance upon it. "I am waiting to see a friend off," she had said, as the official at the barrier questioned her, and she attracted no further notice. Slowly and with downcast eyes, and hands which clasped each other closely under her shawl, she walked up and down, keeping close to the wall, and allowing the groups, as they began to form, to form between her and the edge of the platform. Once or twice she unclasped her hands, and lifted her veil, and breathed deeply, then after one piercing glance, which comprehended every face under the roof within its vision, dropped it again. Once, as she did this, a nursemaid with a child in her arms at the back of the platform noticed her, and said to a fellow-servant:

"That woman's face is enough to frighten one; she looks like death!"

But life was strong in Harriet Routh, and hope was strong in her also, a terrible hope, indeed, which to any suffering less than hers would have worn the semblance of despair. A little while now and he would be safe, safe for the present, for the next few hours which were so all-important. The letter she had written, telling him all she had done, and why, would await him at Amiens, and show him that all his plans were vain, would convince him at last. The arrangement of his money matters, which he must have made for the flight he contemplated, would avail in the case of this

flight which she had imposed upon him. A little more torture, a little more suspense, and something like rest would come. Perhaps she should be able to sleep a little to-night, while he would be speeding through the darkness to safety. Something like a forlorn sense of peace came to her with the anticipation. So she walked up and down, thinking these thoughts, and sometimes lapsing into a mental blank, out of which condition she would come with a start, to go into a kind of vision of the last two days—of the woman she had so completely mastered—of the last time she had seen her husband's face—of the blow he had struck her; but she felt no anger in the remembrance; what did it matter now, in the face of this great crisis? It was strange that she had heard nothing of George, and the fact rendered her only the more eager and apprehensive. He was busy with the investigation, which must end in—what? In that which she had now effectually prevented. So she walked up and down, thinking, and the platform became peopled, and all the fuss and hurry of the departure of the tidal train was around her. Presently, as she reached the end of the platform, and turned, to resume her walk, she saw her husband, coming quickly towards the line of carriages, carrying the small bag which had been sent to him at Tokenhouse-yard in the morning, and which she had packed with reference to this occasion. Routh, indeed, had been not a little surprised by its contents. He came along the platform, the bag in one hand, a letter in the other, looking frowningly round, as though in search of somebody. She shrank back, as much out of sight as possible. Presently, just as he was stepping into a carriage, Jim Swain appeared, and went up to him. A few words passed between them, and then Harriet saw two persons, one of whom was a smart, slightly built man in a gray suit, address him. Straining her eyes with a fixed intensity of gaze which made her brain ache, she looked. He tore the letter in his hand to pieces, with inconceivable quickness, the fragments fluttering to the ground, turned, and with one of his unknown interlocutors on either side, and Jim following—how strange the boy looked, Harriet thought—walked along the platform, passed through the barrier, and was lost to her gaze at the distant entrance.

Harriet stood rooted to the spot. It was not until all the passengers had taken their places, and the train had gone off with a shriek and a pant, that she had the power to move. Then a moan of utter despair burst from her white lips, and a cold thrill shook her limbs, as she murmured :

"He has been called back on business, and he is lost, utterly lost."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"STRONG AS DEATH."

UNSPEAKABLE terror laid its paralysing grasp upon Harriet ; upon her heart, which ceased, it seemed to her, to beat ; upon her limbs, which refused to obey the impulse of her will. Alone she stood upon the platform, long after the train had disappeared, and thought failed her with the power of movement ; a blank fell upon her. A porter addressed her, but she stared stupidly in his face, and made no reply.

"The lady's ill," the man said to another ; "I had better take her to the waiting-room, and fetch a cab. If you'll come this way, ma'am—"

Then Harriet's faculties awoke with a start. "No, thank you," she said ; "I must get home." And she walked swiftly and steadily away. Two of the superior officials were talking together close to the door through which she had to pass, and she heard one of them say :

"Very quietly done, if it was so ; and I'm pretty sure it was ; I couldn't be mistaken in Tatlow."

The words conveyed no meaning, no alarm to Harriet. She went on, and out into the crowded street. She walked a long way before she felt that she could bear the restraint, the sitting still implied by driving in any vehicle. But when she reached Tokenhouse-yard, and found that nothing was known there of

Routh, that no message had been received from him since he had left that evening, she got into a cab and went home. No news there, no message, no letter. Nothing for her to do but wait, to wait as patiently as she could, while the servants speculated upon the queer state of affairs, commented upon "master's" absence on the preceding night, and hoped he had not "bolted"—a proceeding which they understood was not uncommon in the case of gentlemen of Routh's anomalous and dim profession. Nothing for her to do but to wait, nothing but the hardest of all tasks, the most agonizing of all sufferings. And this was the night which was to have brought her, with utter despair for herself, rest. Rest of body, which she had never so sorely needed, and had never felt so impossible of attainment. Her iron strength and endurance were gone now. Her whole frame ached, her nerves thrilled like the strings of a musical instrument, a terrible interior distraction and hurry came over her at intervals, and seemed to sweep away her consciousness of reality without deadening her sense of suffering. She did not now wonder whether she was going mad; since she had known the very, very worst of her own fate, that fear had entirely left her. She wondered now whether she was dying. Wondered, with some curiosity, but no fear; wondered, with a vague feeling of the strangeness of the irruption of utter nothingness into such a chaos of suffering and dread as life had become to her. There would be rest, but not the consciousness of it; she would no more exist. A little while ago she would have shrunk from that, because love remained to her; but now—If she could but know the worst, know the truth, know that he could not be saved, or that he was safe, she would not care how soon she ceased to be one of the facts of the universe. *She* had never mattered much; she did not much matter now. But these thoughts crossed her mind vaguely and rarely; for the most part it was abandoned to the tumultuous agony of her ignorance and suspense. Still no letter, no message. The time wore on, and it was nine o'clock when Harriet heard a ring at the door, and a man's voice asking to see Mrs Routh. It was not a voice she knew; and even while she eagerly hoped the man might have come to her from Routh, she trembled at the thought that he might be the bearer of a com-

munication from George Dallas, for whose silence she had been thankful, but unable to account.

The man was a clerk from Mr Lowther's office, and his errand was to deliver to Mrs Routh a letter, "on very important business," he said, which he had directions to give into her own hands. He executed his commission, retired promptly, and Harriet was left alone to find the solution of all her doubts, the termination of all her suspense, in Jim Swain's letter.

The approaches to the Mansion House 'police-court, and the precincts of the court itself, were densely crowded. All sorts of rumours prevailed respecting the reported discovery of the mystery which had perplexed the police and the public in the spring. The arrest of two persons at different places, and the reports, garbled, exaggerated, and distorted as they were, of the circumstances which had led to the discovery which directed suspicion towards the second of the two accused persons had keenly excited the public curiosity. The proceedings of the coroner's inquest upon the body of the unknown man had been raked up and read with avidity; and the oozing out of even the smallest particulars relative to the two prisoners was eagerly watched for by the greedy crowd. Curiosity and expectation were obliged to satisfy themselves for the nonce with the proceedings in the case of Stewart Routh. George Dallas was unable to appear; since the previous day his illness had materially increased, and the official medical report pronounced it to be brain fever. Unconscious of the tremendous danger in which he stood, oblivious even of the frightful discovery which had struck him so heavy a blow, George Dallas lay, under suspicion of a dreadful crime, in prison-ward, and under prison watch and care. So attention and curiosity centred themselves in Stewart Routh, and the wildest stories were propagated, the wildest conjectures ran riot.

The prisoner had been brought up, with the customary formalities, at an early hour, and the examination, which was likely to last some time, had begun, when Mr Felton, who was in the court with Mr Carruthers, pressed that gentleman's arm, and whispered:

"Look there! To the left, just under the window. Do you see her?"

"I see a woman—yes," replied Mr Carruthers.

"His wife!" said Mr Felton, in a tone of compassionate amazement. It was his wife. Thus Routh and Harriet found themselves face to face again. As the prisoner's eye, shifting restlessly around him, seeing curious faces, full of avidity, but not one ray of compassion, fell upon her, every trace of colour faded out of his cheek, and he drew one deep, gasping breath. Had she betrayed him? He should soon know; the story about to be told would soon enlighten him. Did he really think she had done so? Did he really believe it for one minute? No. He had tried, in the blind fury of his rage, when he found himself trapped, balked, hopelessly in the power of the law, and the game utterly up—when, in the loneliness of the night, he had brooded savagely over the hopes he had entertained, over the dazzling pictures his fancy had painted, then he had tried to accuse her, he had hated and execrated her, and tried to accuse her. But in vain; he was not a fool, villain as he was, and his common sense forbade the success of the attempt. And now, when he saw her, her from whom he had last parted with a cruel blow, and a word that was more cruel, it was as though all his past life looked out at him through her woful blue eyes. Awfully it looked at him, and held him fascinated, even to a brief oblivion of the scene around him. She had raised her veil, not quite off her face, but so that he could see her distinctly, and when he looked at her, her lips parted, in a vain heroic attempt to smile. But they only quivered and closed again, and she knew it, and drew the veil closely round her face, and sat thenceforth, her head falling forward upon her breast, her figure quite motionless.

The ordinary business of the place and the occasion went on, intensified in interest to the spectators by the presence of the murdered man's father, in the sensational character of a witness. Harriet's relation to the prisoner was not divined by the public, and so she passed unnoticed.

Jim Swain was, of course, the chief witness, and he told his story with clearness and directness, though he was evidently and deeply affected by the sight of Harriet, whom his quick eye instantly recognized. She took no notice; she did not change her

position, or raise her veil as the examination of the boy proceeded, as minute by minute she heard and felt the last chance, the last faint hope of escape, slip away, and the terrible certainty of doom become clearer and more imminent. She heard and saw the boy whose story contained the destruction of hope and life, showed her the utter futility of all the plans they had concocted, of all the precautions they had taken; showed her that while they had fenced themselves from the danger without, the unsuspected ruin was close beside them, always near, wholly unmoved. It had come, it had happened; all was over, it did not matter how. There was no room for anger, no power of surprise or curiosity left in her mind. As the golden locket was produced, and the identity of the portrait with that of the murdered man was sworn to, a kind of vision came to her. She saw the bright spring morning once more, and the lonely bridge; she saw the river with the early sunlight upon it; she saw herself leaning over the parapet and looking into the water, as the parcel she had carried thither with careful haste sank into the depth and was hidden. She saw herself returning homeward, the dangerous link in the evidence destroyed, passing by the archway, where a boy lay, whom she had pitied, even then, in her own great and terrible anguish. If anything could be strange now, it would be strange to remember what he then had in his possession, to render all her precaution vain. But she could not feel it so, or think about it; all things were alike to her henceforth, there was no strangeness or familiarity in them for evermore. Occasionally, for a minute, the place she was in seemed to grow unreal to her, and to fade; the next, she took up the full sense of the words which were being spoken, and every face in the crowd, every detail of the building, every accident of the scene, seemed to strike upon her brain through her eyes. She never looked at Jim, but she saw him distinctly; she saw also the look with which Routh regarded him.

That look was murderous. As the boy's story made his motives evident, as it exposed the fallacious nature of the security on which Routh had built, as it made him see how true had been Harriet's prevision, how wise her counsel—though he hated her

all the more bitterly as the knowledge grew more and more irresistible—the murderous impulse rose to fury within him. Standing there a prisoner, helpless, and certain of condemnation, for he never had a doubt of that, the chain he had helped to forge by his counsel to Dallas was too strong to be broken; he would have taken two more lives if he had had the power and the chance—the boy's, and that accursed woman's. Not his wife's, not Harriet's; he knew now, he saw now, she had not brought him to this. But the other, the other who had tempted him and lured him; who had defeated him, ruined him, and escaped. He knew her shallow character and her cold heart, and his fierce, vindictive, passionate, sensual nature was stirred by horrid pangs of fury and powerless hate as he thought of her—of the triumphant beauty which he had so coveted, of the wealth he had so nearly clutched—triumphant, and happy, and powerful still, while he—he! Already the bitterness and blackness of death were upon him.

And the boy! So powerful, even now, was the egotism of the man's nature, that he winced under the pain of the defeat the boy had inflicted upon him—winced under the defeat while he trembled at the destruction. He had kept him near him, under his hand, that if the need should arise he might use him as an instrument for the ruin of George Dallas, and so had provided for his own ruin. The active hate and persistent plan of another could not have worked more surely against him than he had himself wrought, and the sense of the boy's instrumentality became unbearably degrading to him, wounding him where he was most vulnerable.

Thus all black and evil passions raged in his heart; and as his wife looked in his face, she read them there as in a printed book, and once again the feeling of last night came over her, of the strangeness of a sudden cessation to all this, and also something like a dreary satisfaction in the knowledge that it was within her power and his to bid it all cease—to have done with it.

Looking at him, and thinking this, if the strange dream of her mind may be called thought, the curiosity of the crowd began to anger her a little. What was the dead man to them, the name-

less stranger, that they should care for the discovery—that they should come here to see the agony of another man, destined, like the first, to die? The popular instinct filled her with loathing, but only momentarily; she forgot to think of it the next minute, and the vagueness came again, the film and the dimness, and again the acute distinctness of sound, the intensity of vision.

It was over at length. The prisoner was committed for trial. As he was removed with the celerity usual on such occasions, Harriet made a slight sign to the solicitor acting for Routh—a sign evidently preconcerted, for he approached the magistrate, and addressed him in a low voice. The reply was favourable to his request, and he, in his turn, signed to Harriet, who left her place and came to where he was standing. He placed her in the box, and she stood there firmly, having bowed to the magistrate, who addressed her:

“You are the prisoner’s wife?”

“I am.”

“You wish to speak to me?”

“I wish to ask your permission to see my husband before he is removed.”

“You may do so. Take care of the lady.”

This to one of the officials. The tone of the magistrate’s reply to Harriet was compassionate, though he spoke briefly; and he looked intently at her as she bowed again and turned meekly away. He has said, since then, that he never saw supreme despair in any face before.

“You have not much time,” the policeman said, not unkindly, who conducted her to the lock-up cell where Routh was. She made no answer, but went in, and the door was locked behind her. He was sitting on a bench exactly in front of the door, and the moment she passed it her eyes met his. Fury and gloom were lowering upon his face; he looked up sullenly at her, but did not speak. She stood by the door, leaning against it, and said, in a low tone:

“I have but a little time, they tell me. I am come to learn your will. It was agreed between us, once, that if the worst

came, I should supply you with the means of disposing of your fate. I remembered that agreement, and I have brought you *this*."

She put her hand to her bosom, and took out of her dress a small phial. It contained prussic acid, and was sealed and stoppered with glass.

He started and groaned, but did not yet speak.

"The worst *has* come," she said. "I do not say you ought not to face it out, still I only do as you once desired me to do in such a case. The decision is with yourself. This is my only opportunity of obeying you, and I do so."

"The worst has come," he said, in a hoarse voice, not in the least like his own; "you are sure the worst has come? He said it was a bad case, a very bad case. Yes, the worst has come."

Her hand was stretched out, the phial in it. He made no attempt to take it from her. She held it still, and spoke again:

"I have very little time. You will be searched presently, they tell me, and this will be found, it may be. I have obeyed you to the last, as from the beginning."

"There's no chance—you are quite sure there is no chance?"

"I am quite sure there is no chance. I have always known, if this happened, there could be no chance."

He muttered something under his breath.

"I do not hear you," she said. "You are reproaching me, I dare say, but it is not worth while. If you make no use of this, you will have time to reproach me as much as you like. If you do make use of it, reproach is past, with time and life. Have you decided?"

"No," he said; "give it to me. If I use it, it must be very soon—if not, never."

She laid the phial on the bench beside him, and he took it up, and placed it in his breast-pocket. She did not touch him, but when she had laid the phial down, stepped back, and leaned against the door.

"Is there anything you want to know—anything I can tell you?" she asked. "Again, my time is very short."

"No," he said; "if I make up my mind to go through this, I shall know all I want; if I don't, I need not know anything."

"Just so," she said, quietly. He looked on the ground, she looked at him.

"Harriet," he said, suddenly, "I am sorry, I—"

"Hush," she said, flushing scarlet for one brief moment, and putting out her hand. "No more. All is over, and done with. The past is dead, and I am dead with it. Not a word of me."

"But if—if—" he touched his coat-pocket. "I must first know what is to become of you."

"Must you?" she said, and the faintest possible alteration came in her voice—a little, little softening, and a slight touch of surprise. "I think you might have known that I shall live until I know you are no longer living."

"Sorry to interrupt you, ma'am," said the policeman who had brought Harriet to the cell, unlocking the door with sharp suddenness—"very sorry, I'm sure; but—"

"I am quite ready," said Harriet; and, as Routh started up, she turned, and was outside the door in an instant. Two policemen were in the passage; at the door through which she had been led from the court, Routh's solicitor was standing. He took her arm in his, and brought her away by a private entrance. They did not speak till she was in the street, where she saw, at a little distance, a crowd collected to watch the exit of the prison-van. He called a cab.

"Where to?"

"My house."

"I will go with you."

"No, thank you. Indeed, I would rather go alone."

"I shall see you this evening."

She bent her head in reply.

When she was seated in the cab she put out her hand to him, and as she leaned forward he saw her awful face.

"God help you, Mrs Routh," he said, with intense pity. Then she said, in a clear low voice, whose tone he remembers, as he remembers the face, these words:

"There is no God. If there were, there could be no such men as he, and no such women as I."

When she was a short distance from the police-court, and beyond the solicitor's sight, she called to the driver from the window that she had changed her purpose, and desired to be set down at St Paul's Churchyard.

The arrival of the prison-van at Newgate excited the usual sensation which it produces among the public who congregate in the neighbourhood of the prison, to see it discharge its wretched contents; the majority of the crowd were, as usual, of the dangerous classes; and it would have afforded matter of speculation to the curious in such things to look at their faces and calculate, according to the indices there given, how many of the number would one day take a personal part in a spectacle similar to that at which they were gazing with a curiosity which renewed itself daily. On this occasion the sentiment prevalent on the outside of the grim fortress of crime was shared in an unusual degree by the officials, and general, not criminal, inhabitants. Not that a supposed murderer's arrival was any novelty at Newgate, but that the supposed murderer in the present instance was not of the class among which society ordinarily recruits its murderers, and the circumstances both of the crime and of its discovery were exceptional. Thus, when the gate unclosed by which the prisoners were to be admitted, the yard was full of spectators.

Four prisoners were committed that day: a burglar and his assistant; a merchant's clerk who had managed a forgery so remarkably cleverly that it needed only not to have been found out, to have been a stroke of brilliant genius; and Stewart Routh. The door was opened, the group of spectators gathered around. First the burglar, a wiry little man, more like the tailor of real life than the conventional hero of the centre-bit and the jenny. Next, his assistant, an individual of jovial appearance, tempered with responsibility, like a popular president of school feasts, or the leader of a village choir. Thirdly, the forger, remarkable for nothing in his appearance except its abjectness of fright and bewilderment. These had emerged from the darksome recesses of the hideous caravan, the first and no slight instalment of their punishment, and

had been received with comparative indifference. A passing glance was all that was accorded to them by the spectators waiting the appearance of the "gentleman" who was in such very serious "trouble."

But the gentleman did not follow his temporary associates, though the policeman in attendance held the door open, and called to him to "come on." Then he stepped into the van and up to the compartment in which Routh had been placed. After an elapse of a full minute he emerged, and addressing the lookers-on generally, he said :

"There's something queer the matter with him, and I think he's dead !"

A stir and confusion among the crowd, and the governor called for. A matter-of-fact turnkey advances, saying, in a business-like tone :

"Haul him out, and let's see."

They do haul him out, and they do see. His face is rather bluish in colour, and his eyes are open, but his hands are clenched, and his tongue is rigid. And he is quite dead. So there is a great sensation around the prison. The senseless figure is carried into the prison, the door is promptly shut, and the rumour spreads through the crowd, trying to find chinks which do not exist, and to hear sounds inaudible, that the "murder" case is disposed of, the prisoner having tried, condemned, and executed himself. And, though the incident is highly sensational, the general feeling is disappointment.

A woman, plainly dressed and closely veiled, who has been lingering about the street for some time, and was there when the van arrived, has seen the figure lifted from the van and has heard the rumour. But she waits a little while longer, until a policeman comes out of a side-entrance, and while some eager inquirers, chiefly women, question him, and he tells them it is quite true, the man committed for trial for the river-side murder is really dead, she stands by and listens. Then she draws her shawl closely round her, and shivers, and goes away. After she has taken a few steps, she falters and sways a little, but she leans

against the wall, her hands pressed upon her breast, but quietly, attracting no attention, until she has regained her composure and her breath, and then goes on, along the street, and so out into Holborn.

"She has not been seen or heard of, at his chambers or at home," said Mr Carruthers to Mr Felton late that evening. "Nothing is known of her. They say she has no friends; I could not find out from the servants that she has a single acquaintance even to whose house she could have gone."

Mr Felton was infinitely distressed by this news which Mr Carruthers, whose active benevolence, guided by the judgment of others, knew no bounds, brought to his brother-in-law, who was at length exhausted, and unable to rise. They had heard early in the afternoon of the death of Routh, and had at once been aroused to the warmest compassion for Harriet. Clare, having left the unconscious Mrs Carruthers tranquilly asleep, had gone to Mr Felton's lodgings, and was there when her uncle came in with his report.

"Laura has no suspicion?" asked Mr Felton.

"Not the slightest. She has no notion that you and George are not still in Paris. I must say Clare is an admirable girl to keep a secret and play a part."

Clare blushed a little at her uncle's praise.

"What is to be done now about this unfortunate woman? She must be found. Apart from every other consideration, George would be infinitely distressed if any harm came to her."

"I really don't know," said Mr Carruthers. "There seems to be no clue to her probable movements, and—Come in." This was in answer to a knock at the door.

Jim Swain came in, his face full of eagerness:

"Have you found her, sir? Is she at home? Does she know?"

"No, Jim," said Mr Felton, "she's not at home, and no one knows anything of her."

"Sir," exclaimed Jim—"miss, I'm sure she's somewheres about prison. Has any one thought of lookin' for her there? She'd

go there, sir and miss—she'd go there. Take me with you, and let us go and look for her. I daren't go alone; she wouldn't listen to me, she wouldn't look at me; but I'm sure she's there."

"Uncle," said Clare, earnestly, "I am sure he is right—I feel sure he is right. Pray go; take one of the servants and him. The carriage is waiting for me; take it and go.

Mr Carruthers did as she desired. It was wonderful to see the change that had come over him with the awakening of his better nature. He had always been energetic, and now he forgot to be pompous and self-engrossed.

The streets in the dismal quarter of the prison were comparatively silent and empty when Mr Carruthers called to the coachman to stop, and got out of the carriage, Jim descending from the box, and they began their dismal search. It was not prolonged or difficult.

They found her sitting on the ground, supported by the prison wall, in an angle where after nightfall there was little resort of footsteps and but dim light—a corner in which the tired wayfarer might rest, unquestioned, for a little, by either the policeman or the passer-by. And no more tired wayfarer had ever sat down to rest, even in the pitiless London streets, than the woman who had wandered about until the friendly night had fallen, and had then come there to die, and have done with it.

They took her to her own home, and when they removed her shawl a slip of paper, on which George Dallas's name was written, was found pinned to the front of her dress. It contained these words:

"The boy's story is true. I did not keep the diamonds taken out of the studs. You sold them when you sold your mother's. I was always sorry you ever knew us. H. ROUTH."

* * * * *

George Dallas is in New York with Mr Felton, who is winding-up all his affairs, with a view to a permanent residence in England. Jim Swain, whose education includes the art of writing now, is attached to the personal service of Mr Dallas, who is understood to be his uncle's heir.

Miss Carruthers is at Poynings, not to be tempted by London and its pleasures ; but the absence of the young and beautiful heiress is not so deeply deplored by "society" as it would be, were it not generally known that she is engaged.

THE END.

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